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MOSHEIM'S

CHURCH HISTORY,

OF

THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES,

(*Maclaine's Translation,*)

IN WHICH

THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND VARIATIONS

OF

CHURCH POWER,

ARE CONSIDERED IN THEIR CONNEXION WITH THE STATE OF

LEARNING AND PHILOSOPHY,

AND THE

Political History of Europe during that period.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

RESPECTED READER: We live in an age pre-eminently characterized by the spirit of inquiry. And the range of that spirit comprises the whole extent of society and nature. Its direction is towards the origin, or constituent elements of things. Whoever wishes to investigate matters successfully must begin the origin or primary principles of subjects. In this way, the spirit of investigation has evolved many of those conveniences which are so highly conducive to the civil and domestic comfort of the present age. It would betray some listlessness on our part, not to suppose that that same spirit of inquiry would enter the enclosures of religion. It has done it. All the commotions and divisions among the different denominations of Christian professors, are evidences of the fact. For nearly all the leading denominations in this Union have been subjects of division and subdivisions. The Lutheran church, the oldest Protestant denomination, has been divided into Generalists and Hinkelites, into Old and New Measure parties; the Episcopalians into High and Low church; the Presbyterians into Old and New school; the Baptists into Calvanistic and Free Will, and other minor parties; the Methodists into Episcopal Methodists, Protestant Methodists, and True Wesleyans, and even the otherwise pacific Friends, have been divided into Orthodox and Hicksites. Men are inquiring after original principles. Human authority in religious matters, is on the wane. But it is to be regretted that the different denominations in their discussions of the question, "Who of the denomination constitutes the

original church of the order," did not in their inquiries after first principles, go back to the original principles of *Christianity* instead of to the principles that characterized the originators of their party, a few hundred years ago. That is too great a distance on this side of the right place. In civil government it is constantly inculcated that a frequent recurrence to first principles is essentially necessary for the preservation of our civil immunities; and not less ought it to be so, in ascertaining the true character of the Christian faith. We must go back and ascertain what the first Christians believed and practiced. They were the best exponents of "the faith once delivered to the saints," within the whole scope of inquiry upon this subject.

In furnishing you with this volume, the subscriber aims to put you in possession of a means by which, in connexion with a proper study of the New Testament, you will be able to form a correct and safe idea of the original character of Christianity; and will also enable you to form an estimate of the nearness to, or remoteness from the primitive standard, of any religious operations you may witness at the present day, and to decide how far professed Christians have departed from the ancient faith. Mosheim, pronounced Mos-hime, not Mosh-eem, the author of the work now in your hands, was a Lutheran, and one of the most learned men of Germany. He wrote numerous works of various sizes, and died in the year 1755. His History is a standing authority in the usual course of orthodox Theological studies.

Should you meet some things in his History which you have hitherto considered as novel peculiarities of some professors of the Christian faith, in your midst, please to bear in mind that the force of truth and the spirit of impartiality, and not his party position, impelled him to state things as they existed among the first Christians. I give you his History of the first and second centuries without note and comment, and without any additions whatever of my own; nor

did I think profitable or essential to give his own notes, as they generally consist of references to ancient authors; and those that are not so, do not throw any special light on the subjects to which they refer. A few of the important points have been italicised to arrest the reader's attention. It is hoped you will read his introduction carefully. It is true, that it was written for his whole work, but in view of its valuable import, it was deemed proper to insert the whole of it in this volume. Reader, have you a family growing up that can read and reflect? then put this book into their hands; it will, in connexion with the Bible, aid them much to decide how to embrace and cherish the Christian faith. May your reading of Christian antiquities produce in you an attachment to the Redeemer of your spirit, and lead you to such a a course of obedience to him, as will issue in your eternal salvation!

S. K. HOSHOUR.

INTRODUCTION.

Definition of Church History—Division of Church History into external and internal—The external which comprehends the prosperous and calamitous events that happened to the church—Prosperous events—Calamitous events—Internal history, which comprehends,—First, the history of the Christian Teachers—Secondly, the history of the doctrines and laws of the church—Rules necessary to be observed in giving a history of the doctrines of the christian church—Thirdly, the history of its ceremonies and worship—Fourthly, the history of the heresies that have divided it—In treating Church History, events are to be considered in connexion with their causes—General method of investigating the secret causes of things—More particular rules for coming to this knowledge in the external history of the church; and in its internal history—The sources from whence Church History must be derived—The essential qualities of Church History—A historian must be free from a servile attachment to times, men, and opinions—The defects that are visible in the writers of Church History—The advantages that result from the study of Church History—General and particular—The method of treating Church History in its external and internal branches.

Church History is a clear and faithful narration of the transactions, revolutions, and events that relate to that large community which bears the name of Jesus Christ, and is vulgarly known under the denomination of the church. It comprehends both the *external* and *internal* condition of this community, and so connects each event with the causes from which it proceeds, and the instruments which have been concerned in its production, that the attentive reader may be led to observe the displays of providential wisdom and goodness in the preservation of the church, and thus find his piety improved, as well as his knowledge.

The church, founded by the ministry and death of Christ, cannot be represented with more perspicuity and propriety than under the notion of a society subjected to a lawful dominion, and governed by certain laws and institutions, mostly of a moral and spiritual tendency. To such a society many external events must happen, which will advance or oppose its interests, and accelerate or retard its progress towards perfection, in consequence of its unavoidable connexion with the course and revolutions of human affairs. Moreover, as nothing is stable and uniform where the imperfections of humanity take place, this religious society beside the

vicissitudes to which it must be exposed from the influence of external events, must be liable to various changes in its internal constitution. In this view of things then it appears, that the history of the church, like that of the state, may be divided, with propriety into two general branches, which we may call its *external* and *internal* history.

The *external history* of the church comprehends all the changes, vicissitudes, and events, that have diversified the external state and condition of this sacred community. And as all public societies have their periods of lustre and decay, and are exposed to revolutions both of a happy and calamitous nature, so this first branch of Church History may be subdivided into two, comprehending respectively, the *prosperous* and *calamitous* events that have happened to the church.

The *prosperous* events that have contributed to extend the limits, or to augment the influence of the Christian church, have proceeded either from its rulers and leaders, or from the subordinate members of this great community. Under the former Class, we rank its *public* rulers, such as princes magistrates, and pontiffs, who, by their authority and laws, their liberality, and even their arms, have maintained its cause and extended its borders; as also its more *private* leaders, its learned and pious teachers, whose wise counsels, pious exploits, eminent examples, and distinguished abilities have contributed most to promote its *true* prosperity and lustre.—Under the latter class, we may comprehend the advantages which the cause of Christianity has derived from the active faith, the invincible constancy, the fervent piety, and extensive charity of its genuine professers, who, by the attractive lustre of these amiable virtues, have led many into the way of truth, and engaged them to submit themselves to the empire of the Messiah.

Under the *Calamitous* events that have happened to the church may be comprehended the injuries it has received from the vices and passions of its friends, and the bitter opposition and insiduous stratagems of its enemies. The professors of Christianity, and more especially the teachers and rulers of the Church, have done unspeakable detriment to the Cause of religion, by their ignorance and sloth, their luxury and ambition, their uncharitable zeal, animosities and contentions, of which many shocking examples will be exhibited in the course of this history. Christianity had *public* enemies to encounter, even princes and magistrates, who op-

posed its progress by penal laws, and blood-thirsty persecution: it had also private and inveterate adversaries in a certain set of philosophers, or rather sophists, who, enslaved to superstition, or abandoned to atheism, endeavoured to blast the rising church by their perfidious accusations and their virulent writings.

Such then are the events that are exhibited to our view in the external history of the church. Its *internal history* comprehends the changes and vicissitudes that have happened in its inward constitution, in that system of discipline and doctrine by which it stands distinguished from all other religious societies. This branch may be properly termed the *History of the Christian Religion.* The causes of these internal changes are to be sought for principally in the conduct and measures of those who have presided and borne rule in the church. It has been too frequently their *practice to interpret the truths and precepts of religion in a manner accommodated to their particular systems, nay, to their private interest;* and while they have found in some implicit obedience they have met with warm opposition from others. Hence have proceeded theological broils and civil commotions, in which the cause of religion has often been defended at the expense both of justice and humanity. All these things must be observed with the strictest attention by a church historian.

The first thing, therefore, that should be naturally treated in the *internal history* of the church. is the history of its ministers, rulers, and form of government. When we look back to the commencement of the Christian church, we find its government administered jointly by the *pastors and the people.* But, in process of time, the scene changes, and we see these pastors affecting an air of pre-eminence and superiority, trampling upon the rights and privileges of the community, and assuming to themselves a supreme authority both in civil and religious matters. This invasion of the rights of the people was at length carried to such a height, that a single man administered, or at least pretended a right to administer, the affairs of the whole church with an unlimited sway. Among the teachers of these early times, there were some who acquired, by their learned labors, a shining reputation, and an universal influence; they were regarded as oracles; their decisions were handed down to posterity as sacred rules of faith and practice; and they thus deserve to be mention-

ed, with particular distinction, among the governors of the church, though no part of its public administration was actually in their hands.

After giving an account of the rulers and teachers of the church, the church historian proceeds to exhibit a view of the *laws* that are peculiar to this sacred community, that form as it were. its centre of union, and distinguish it from all other religious societies. These LAWS are of two kinds. The fitst are properly called *divine*, because they are immediately enacted by God hsmself, and are contained in those sacred books, which carry the most striking marks of a divine origin. They consist of those DOCTRINES that are the objects of faith and reason, and those PRECEPTS that are addressed to the heart and the affections. To the second kind belong those *laws* that are merely of human instution, and derive their authority only from the injunctions of the rulers of the church.

In that part of the sacred history which relates to the doctrines of Christianity, it is necessary, above all things, to inquire particularly into the degree of authority that has been attributed to the sacred writings in all the different periods of the church, and also into the manner in which the divine doctrines they contain, have been explained and illustrated.—For the true *state of religion* in every age can only be learned from the point of view in which these celestial oracles were considered, and from the manner in which they were expounded to the people. As long as they were the only rule of faith, religion preserved its *native purity;* and in proportion as their decisions were either neglected or postponed to the inventions of men, it degenerated from its primitive and divine simplicity. It is further necessary to show under this head, what was the fate of the pure laws and doctrines of Christianity; how they were interpreted and explained; how they were defended against the enemies of the gospel; how they were corrupted and adulterated by the ignorance and licentiousness of men. And, finally, it will be proper to inquire here, how far the lives and manners of Christians have been conformable to the dictates of these sacred laws, and the influence that these sublime doctrines ought to have upon the hearts of men; as also to examine the rules of discipline prescribed by the spiritual governors of the church, in order to correct and restrain the vices and irregularities of its members.

The *human laws*, that constitute a part of church gov-

ernment, consist in precepts concerning the external worship of the Deity, and in certain rites, either confirmed by custom or introduced by positive and express authority. *Rites* and *Ceremonies* regard religion either *directly* or *indirectly;* by the former, we understand those that are used in the immediate worship of the Supreme Being, whether in public or in private; by the latter, such pious and decent institutions as, beside direct acts of worship have obtained in the church. This part of sacred history is of a vast extent, both on account of the great diversity of these ceremonies, and the frequent changes and modifications through which they have passed. This consideration will justify our treating them with brevity, in a work which is only designed as a compendious view of Church History.

As bodies politic are sometimes distracted with wars and seditions, so has the Christian church, though designed to be the mansion of charity and concord, been unhappily perplexed by intestine divisions, occasioned sometimes by points of doctrine, at others by a variety of sentiments about certain rites and ceremonies. The principal authors of these divisions have been stigmatized with the title of *heretics*, and their peculiar opinions of consequence distinguished by the appellation of *heresies*. The nature therefore and progress of these intestine divisions or *heresies* are to be carefully unfolded; and if this be done with judgment and impartiality, it must prove useful and interesting in the highest degree, though at the same time it must be observed, that no branch of Church History is so painful and difficult, on account of the sagacity, candour, and application that it requires, in order to its being treated in a satisfactory manner. The difficulty of arriving at the truth, in researches of this nature, is extreme, on *account of the injurious treatment* that has been shown to the *heads of religious sects*, and the *unfair representations* that have been made of their tenets and opinions; and this difficulty has been considerably augmented by this particular circumstance, that the greatest part of the writings of those who were branded with the name of heretics have not reached our times. It is therefore the duty of a candid historian to avoid attaching to this term the invidious sense in which it is too often used, since it is the invective of all contending parties, and is employed against *truth* as frequently as against *error*. The wisest method here is to take the word *heretic* in its general signification, as denoting a person,

who, either directly or indirectly, has been the occasion of exciting divisions and dissensions among Christians.

After thus considering what constitutes the *matter* of Church History, it will be proper to bestow a few thoughts on the *manner* of treating it, as this is a point of too much importance not to deserve a moment's attention. And here we may observe, that in order to render both the external and internal history of the church truly interesting and useful. it is absolutely necessary to trace effects to their causes, and to connect events with the circumstances, views, principles, and instruments that have contributed to their existence. A bare recital of facts can at best but enrich the *memory*, and furnish a certain degree of amusement; but the historian, who enters into the secret springs that direct the course of outward events, and views things in their various relations, connexions, and tendencies, gives thus a proper exercise to the judgment of the reader, and administers on many occasions, the most useful lessons of wisdom and prudence. It is true, a high degree of caution is to be observed here, lest, in disclosing the secret springs of public events, we substitute imaginary causes in the place of real, and attribute the actions of men to principles they never professed.

In order to discover the secret causes of public events, some general succors are to be derived from the history of the times in which they happened, and the testimonies of the authors by whom they are recorded. But beside these, a considerable acquaintance with human nature, founded on long observation and experience, is singularly useful in researches of this kind. The historian, who has acquired a competent knowledge of the views that occupy the generality of men, who has studied a great variety of characters, and attentively observed the force and violence of human passions, together with the infirmities and contradictions they produce in the conduct of life, will find, in this knowledge, a key to the secret reasons and motives which gave rise to many of the most important events of ancient times. A knowledge also of the manners and opinions of the persons concerned in the events that are related, will contribute much to lead us to the true origin of things.

There are, however, beside these general views, particular considerations, which will assist us still further in tracing up to their true causes the various events of sacred history.— We must for example, in the external history of the church,

attend carefully to two things: *first*, to the political state of those kingdoms and nations in which the christian religion has been embraced or rejected; and, *secondly;* to their religious state, i. e, the opinions they have entertained concerning the divine nature, and the worship that is to be addressed to Him. For we shall then perceive, with more certainty and less difficulty, the reasons of the different reception Christianity has met with in different nations when we are acquainted with the respective forms of civil government, the political maxims, and the public forms of religion that prevailed in those countries and in those periods of time in which the gospel received encouragement or met with opposition.

With respect to the *internal history of the church;* nothing is more adapted to lay open to view the hidden springs of its various changes, than an acquaintance with the *history of learning and philosophy in the times of old. For it is certain, that human learning and philosophy have, in all times, pretended to modify the doctrines of Christianity; and that those pretensions have extended further than belongs to the province of philosophy on the one hand, or is consistent with the purity and simplicity of the gospel on the other.* It may also be observed, that a knowledge of the forms of civil government, and of the superstitious rites and institutions of ancient times, is not only useful, as we remarked above, to illustrate several things in the *external* history of the church, but also to render a satisfactory account of its *internal* variations, both in point of doctrine and worship. For the genius of human laws and the maxims of civil rulers have undoubtedly had a great influence in forming the constitution of the church; and even its spiritual leaders have, in too many instances, from an ill judged prudence, modeled its discipline and worship after the ancient superstitions.

We cannot be at any loss to know the sources from whence this important knowledge is to be derived. The best writers of every age, who make mention of church affairs, and particularly those who were contemporary with the events they relate, are to be carefully consulted; since it is from credible testimonies and respectable authorities that history derives a solid and permanent foundation. Our esteem for those writers, who may be considered as the sources of historical knowledge, ought not however to lead us to treat with neglect the historians and annalists, who have already made use of those original records; since it betrays a fool-

ish sort of vanity to reject the advantages that may be derived from the succors and labors of those who have preceded us in their endeavors to cast light upon matters that have been for many ages covered with obscurity.

From all this we shall easily discern the qualifications that are essential to a good writer of Church History. His knowledge of human affairs must be considerable, and his learning extensive. He must be endowed with a spirit of observation and sagacity; a habit of reasoning with evidence and facility; a faithful memory; and a judgment matured by experience and strengthened by exercise. Such are the intellectual endowments that are required in the character of a good historian; and the moral qualities that are necessary to complete it, are a persevering and inflexible attachment to truth and virtue, a freedom from the servitude of prejudice and passion, and a laborious and patient turn of mind.

Those who undertake to write the history of the christian church are exposed to receive a bias from three different sources, from *times*, *persons*, and *opinions*. The *times*, in which we live, have often so great an influence, on our manner of judging, as to make us consider the events which happen in our days, as a rule by which we are to estimate the probability or evidence of those that are recorded in the history of past ages. The *persons*, on whose testimonies we think we have reason to depend, acquire an imperceptible authority over our sentiments, that too frequently seduces us to adopt their errors, especially if these persons have been distinguished by eminent degrees of sanctity and virtue.—And an attachment to favorite *opinions* leads authors sometimes to pervert, or at least to modify, facts in favor of those who have embraced these opinions, or to the disadvantage of such as have opposed them. These kinds of seduction are so much the more dangerous, as those whom they deceive are, in innumerable cases, insensible of their delusion, and of the false representations of things to which it leads them. It is not necessary to observe the solemn obligations that bind an historian to guard against these three sources of error with the most delicate circumspection, and the most scrupulous attention.

It is well known nevertheless how far Church historians, in all ages, have departed from these rules, and from others of equal evidence and importance. For not to mention those

who lay claim to a high rank among writers of history in consequence of a happy memory, loaded with an ample heap of materials, nor those whose pens are rather guided by sordid views of interest than by a generous love of truth, it is but too evident, how few in number the unprejudiced and impartial historians are, whom neither the influence of the sect to which they belong, nor the venerable and imposing names of antiquity, nor the spirit of the times and the torrent of prevailing *opinion*, can turn aside from the obstinate pursuit of truth *alone*. In the present age, more especially, the spirit of the times and the influence of predominant opinions, have gained with many an incredible ascendant. Hence we find frequently in the writings even of learned men such wretched arguments as these: "Such an opinion is true; therefore it must of necessity be adopted by the primitive christians. Christ has commanded us to live in such a manner; therefore it is undoubtedly certain, that the christians of ancient times lived so. A certain custom does not take place now; therefore it did not prevail in former times."

If those who apply themselves to the composition of Church History be careful to avoid the sources of error mentioned above, their labors will be eminently useful to mankind, and more especially to those who are called to the important office of instructing others in the sacred truths and duties of Christianity. The history of the church presents to our view a variety of objects that are every way adapted to confirm our faith. When we contemplate here the discouraging obstacles, the united efforts of kingdoms and empires, and the dreadful calamities which Christianity, in its very infancy, was obliged to encounter, and over which it gained an immortal victory, this will be sufficient to fortify its true and zealous professors against all the threats, cavils, and stratagems of profane and impious men. The great and shining examples also, which display their lustre, more or less, in every period of the christian history, must have an admirable tendency to inflame our piety, and to excite, even in the coldest and most insensible hearts, the love of God and virtue. Those amazing revolutions and events that distinguished every age of the church, and often seemed to arise from small beginnings, and causes of little consequence, proclaim, with a solemn and respectable voice, the empire of Providence, and also the incon-

stancy and vanity of human things. And, among the many advantages that arise from the study of Church history, it is none of the least, that we shall see therein the origin and occasions of those ridiculous rites, absurd opinions, foolish superstitions, and pernicious errors, with which Christianity is yet disfigured in too many parts of the world. This knowledge will naturally lead us to a view of the truth in its beautiful simplicity, will engage us to love it, and render us zealous in its defence; not to mention the pleasure and satisfaction that we must feel in researches and discoveries of such an interesting kind.

They, more especially, who are appointed to instruct the youth in the public universities, as also such as are set apart for the service of the church, will derive from this study the most useful lessons of wisdom and prudence, to direct them in the discharge of their respective offices. On the one hand, the inconsiderate zeal and temerity of others, and the pernicious consequences with which they have been attended, will teach circumspection; and in the mistakes into which even men of eminent merit and abilities have fallen, they will often see the things they are obliged to avoid, and the sacrifices it will be prudent to make, in order to maintain peace and concord in the church; on the other, illustrious examples and salutary measures will hold forth to them a rule of conduct, a lamp to show them the paths they must pursue. It may be further observed, that, if we except the arms which scripture and reason furnish against superstition and error, there is nothing that will enable us to combat them with more efficacy than the view of their deplorable effects, as they are represented to us in the history of the church. It would be endless to enumerate all the advantages that result from the study of Church History; experience alone can display these in all their extent; nor shall we mention the benefits that may be derived from it by those who have turned their views to other sciences than that of theology, and its more peculiar utility to such as are engaged in the study of the civil law. All this would lead us too far from our present design.

As the history of the church is external or internal, so the manner of treating it must be suited to that division. As to the first, when the narration is long, and the thread of the history runs through a great number of ages, it is proper to divide it into certain periods, which will give the reader

time to breathe, assist memory, and also introduce a certain method and order into the work. In the following history the usual division into centuries is adopted prefarably to all others, because most generally liked; though it be attended with difficulties and inconveniences.

A considerable part of these inconveniences will be however removed, if, beside this smaller division into centuries, we adopt a larger one, and divide the space of time that elapsed between the birth of Christ and our days into certain grand periods, that are distinguished by signal revolutions or remarkable events. It is on this account that we have judged it expedient to comprehend the following history in four books, that will take in four remarkable periods; the First will be employed in exhibiting the state and vicissitudes of the christian church, from its commencement to the time of Constantine the Great. The Second will comprehend the period that extends from the reign of Constantine to that of Charlemagne, which produced such a remarkable change in the face of Europe. The Third will contain the History of the Church, from the time of Charlemagne to the memorable period when Luther arose in Germany to oppose the tyranny of Rome, and to deliver divine truth from the darkness that covered it. And the Fourth will carry down the same history, from the rise of Luther to the present times.

We have seen above, that the sphere of Church History is extensive, that it comprehends a great variety of objects, and embraces political as well as religious matters, so far as the former are related to the latter, either as causes or effects. But however great the diversity of these objects may be, they are closely connected; and it is the particular business of a church historian to observe a method that will show this connexion in the most conspicuous point of view, and form into one regular *whole* a variety of parts that seem heterogeneous and discordant. Different writers have followed here different methods, according to the diversity of their views and their peculiar manner of thinking. The order I have observed will be seen above in that part of this INTRODUCTION, which treats of the subject matter of Church History: the mention of it is therefore omitted here, to avoid unnecessary repetitions.

A

CHURCH HISTORY.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CONTAINING

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH,

FROM

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

TO

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

Roman people and their venerable Senate, though they had not lost all shadow of liberty, were yet, in reality, reduced to a state of servile submission to Augustus Cesar, who, by artifice, perfidy, and blood-shed, had proceeded to an enormous degree of power, and united in his own person the pompous titles of emperor, sovereign, pontiff, censor, tribune of the people, pro-consul; in a word, all the great offices of the state.

The Roman government, considered both with respect to its form, and its laws, was certainly mild and equitable. But the injustice and avarice of the pretors and pro-consuls, and the ambitious lust of conquest and dominion, which was the predominant passion of the Roman people, together with the rapacious proceedings of the publicans, by whom the taxes of the empire were levied, were the occasions of perpetual tumults and unsupportable grievances. And among the many evils that arose from thence we justly reckon the formidable armies, that were necessary to support these extortions in the provinces, and the civil wars which frequently broke out between the oppressed nations and their haughty conquerors.

It must at the same time be acknowledged, that this supreme dominion of one people, or rather of one man, over so many kingdoms, was attended with many considerable advantages to mankind in general, and to the propagation and advancement of Christianity in particular. For, by the means of this almost universal empire, many nations, different in their language and in their manners, were united more intimately together in social intercourse. Hence a passage was opened to the remotest countries, by the communications which the Romans formed between the conquered provinces. Hence also the nations, whose manners were savage and barbarous, were civilized by the laws and commerce of the Romans. And by this, in short, the benign influence of letters and philosophy was spread abroad in countries which had lain before under the darkest ignorance. All this contributed, no doubt, in a singular manner, to facilitate the progress of the gospel, and to crown the labors of its first ministers and heralds with success.

The Roman empire, at the birth of Christ, was less agitated by wars and tumults, than it had been for many years before. For, though I cannot assent to the opinion of those who, following the account of Orosius, maintain that the

temple of Janus was then shut, and that wars and discords absolutely ceased throughout the world; yet it is certain, that the period, in which our Saviour descended upon earth, may be justly styled the *pacific age*, if we compare it with the preceding times. And indeed, the tranquility, that then reigned, was necessary to enable the ministers of Christ, to execute, with success, their sublime commission to the human race.

The want of ancient records, renders it impossible to say any thing satisfactory or certain, concerning the state of those nations, who did not receive the Roman yoke; nor indeed is their history essential to our present purpose. It is sufficient to observe, with respect to them, that those who inhabited the eastern regions were strangers to the sweets of liberty, and groaned under the burden of an oppressive yoke. This, their softness and effeminacy, both in point of manners and bodily constitution, contributed to make them support with an unmanly patience; and even the religion they professed rivetted their chains. On the contrary, the northern nations enjoyed, in their frozen dwellings, the blessings of sacred freedom, which their government, their religion, a robust and vigorous frame of body and spirit, derived from the inclemency and severity of the climate, all united to preserve and maintain.

All these nations lived in the practice of the most abominable superstitions. For though the notion of one Supreme Being was not entirely effaced in the human mind, but showed itself frequently, even through the darkness of the grossest idolatry; yet all nations except that of the Jews acknowledged a number of governing powers, whom they called gods, and one or more of which they supposed to preside over each particular province or people. They worshipped these fictitious deities with various rites; they considered them as widely different from each other in sex, and power, in their nature, and also in their respective offices, and they appeased them by a multiplicity of ceremonies and offerings, in order to obtain their protection and favor. So that, however different the degrees of enormity might be, with which this absurd and impious theology appeared in different countries; yet there was no nation, whose sacred rites and whose religious worship did not discover a manifest abuse of reason, and very striking marks of extravagance and folly.

Every nation then had its respective gods, over which presided one more excellent than the rest; yet in such a manner, that this supreme deity was himself controlled by the rigid empire of the fates, or what the philosophers called *eternal necessity*. The gods of the east were different from those of the Gauls, the Germans, and the other northern nations. The Grecian divinities, differed widely from those of the Egyptians, who deified plants, animals, and a great variety of the productions both of nature and art. Each people also had their own particular manner of worshipping and appeasing their respective deities, entirely different from the sacred rites of other countries. In process of time, however, the Greeks and Romans grew as ambitious in their religious pretensions, as in their political claims. They maintained that *their* gods, though under different names, were the objects of religious worship in all nations, and therefore they gave the names of their deities to those of other countries. This pretension, whether supported by ignorance or other means, introduced inexpressible darkness and perplexity into the history of the ancient superstitions, and has been also the occasion of innumerable errors in the writings of the learned.

One thing, indeed, which at first sight appears very remarkable, is, that this variety of religions and of gods neither produced wars nor dissensions among the different nations, the Egyptians excepted. Nor is it, perhaps, necessary to except even them, since their wars undertaken for their gods cannot be looked upon with propriety as wholly of a religious nature. Each nation suffered its neighbors to follow their own method of worship, to adore their own gods, to enjoy their own rites and ceremonies, and discovered no sort of displeasure at their diversity of sentiments in religious matters. There is, however, little wonderful in this spirit of mutual toleration, when we consider that they all looked upon the world as one great empire, divided into various provinces, over every one of which a certain order of divinities presided; and that, therefore, none could behold with contempt the gods of other nations, or force strangers to pay homage to theirs. The Romans exercised this toleration in the amplest manner. For though they would not allow any changes to be made in the religions that were publicly professed in the empire, nor any new form of worship to be openly introduced; yet they granted to their citizens a full liberty of observing, in private,

the sacred rites of other nations, and of honoring foreign deities, whose worship contained nothing inconsistent with the interests and laws of the republic, with feasts, temples, consecrated groves, and such like testimonies of homage and respect.

The deities of almost all nations were either ancient heroes, renowned for noble exploits and worthy deeds, or kings and generals who had founded empires, or women become illustrious by remarkable actions and useful inventions. The merit of these distinguished and eminent persons, contemplated by their posterity with an enthusiastic gratitude, was the reason of their being exalted to celestial honors. The natural world furnished another kind of deities, that were added to these by some nations. And as the sun, moon, and stars shine forth with a lustre superior to that of all other material beings; so it is certain that they particularly attracted the attention of mankind, and received religious homage from almost all the nations of the world. From these beings of a nobler kind, idolatry descended into an enormous multiplication of inferior powers; so that in many countries, mountains, trees, and rivers, the earth, the sea, and the winds, nay, even virtues, vices, and diseases had their shrines attended by devout and zealous worshippers.

These deities were honored with rites and sacrifices of various kinds, according to their respective nature and offices. The rites used in their worship were absurd and ridiculous, and frequently cruel and obscene. Most nations offered animals, and some proceeded to the enormity of human sacrifices. As to their prayers, they were void of piety and sense, both with respect to their matter and their form. Pontiffs, priests, and ministers, distributed into several classes, presided in this strange worship, and were appointed to prevent disorder in the performance of the sacred rites. This *order*, which was supposed to be distinguished by an immediate intercourse and friendship with the gods, abused their authority in the basest manner, to deceive an ignorant and wretched people.

The religious worship we have now been considering, was confined to stated *times* and *places*. The statues and other representations of the Gods were placed in the temples, and supposed to be animated in an incomprehensible manner.—For the votaries of these fictitious deities, however destitute they might be of reason in other respects, avoided carefully

the imputation of worshipping inanimate beings, such as brass, wood, and stone, and therefore pretended that the divinity represented by the statue, was really present in it, if the dedication was duly and properly made.

But, beside the public worship of the gods, to which all without exception were admitted, there were certain religious institutions and rites celebrated in secret by the Greeks and several eastern nations, to which a very small number were allowed access. These were commonly called *mysteries;* and the persons who desired to be initiated therein, were obliged previously to exhibit satisfactory proofs of their fidelity and patience, by passing through various trials and ceremonies of the most disagreeable kind. The secret of these institutions was kept in the strictest manner, as the initiated could not reveal any thing that passed in them without exposing their lives to the most imminent danger; and that is the reason why, at this time, we are so little acquainted with the true nature and the real design of these hidden rites. It is, however, well known, that, in some of those *mysteries*, many things were transacted that were contrary both to real modesty and outward decency. And indeed, from all the pagan rites, the intelligent few might easily learn, that the divinities generally worshipped, were rather men famous for their vices, than distinguished by virtuous and worthy deeds.

It is at least certain, that this religion had not the least influence toward the exciting or nourishing solid and true virtue in the minds of men. For the gods and goddesses to whom public homage was paid, exhibited to their worshippers rather examples of egregious crimes, than of useful and illustrious virtues. The gods, moreover, were esteemed superior to men in power and immortality; but in every thing else, they were considered as their equals. The priests were little solicitous to animate the people to a virtuous conduct, either by their precepts or by their example; nay, they plainly enough declared, that all that was essential to the true worship of the gods, was contained only in the rites and institutions which the people had received by tradition from their ancestors. And as to what regarded the rewards of virtue, and the punishment of vice after this life, the general notions were partly uncertain, partly licentious, and often more proper to administer indulgence to vice, than encouragement to virtue. Hence the wiser

part of mankind, about the time of Christ's birth, looked upon this whole system of religion as a just object of ridicule and contempt.

The consequence of this wretched theology were a universal corruption of manners, which discovered itself in the impunity of the most flagitious crimes. Juvenal and Persius among the Latins, and Lucian among the Greeks, bear testimony to the justice of this heavy accusation. It is also well known, that no public law prohibited the sports of gladiators, the exercise of unnatural lusts, the licentiousness of divorce, the custom of exposing infants, and of procuring abortions, nor the frontless atrocity of consecrating publicly stews and brothels to certain divinities.

Such as were not sunk in an unaccountable and brutish stupidity, perceived the deformity of these religious sytems. To these the crafty priests addressed two considerations, to prevent their incredulity, and to dispel their doubts. The first was drawn from the miracles and prodigies which they pretended were daily wrought in the temples, before the statues of the gods and the heroes that were placed there; and the second was deduced from oracles and divination, by which they maintained that the secrets of futurity were unfolded through the interposition of the gods. In both these points the cunning of the priests imposed miserably upon the ignorance of the people; and if the discerning few saw the cheat, they were obliged, from a regard to their own safety, to laugh with caution, since the priests were even ready to accuse, before a raging and superstitious multitude, those who discovered their religious frauds, as rebels against the majesty of the immortal gods.

At the time of Christ's appearance upon earth, the religion of the Romans, as well as their arms, had extended itself through a great part of the world. This religion must be known to those who are acquainted with the Grecian superstitions. In some things, indeed, it differs from them; for the Romans, beside the institutions which Numa and others had invented with political views, added several Italic and Hetrurian fictions to the Grecian fables, and gave also to Egyptian deities a place among their own.

In the provinces subjected to the Roman government, there arose a new kind of religion, formed by a mixture of the ancient rites of the conquered nations with those of the Romans. These nations who, before their subjection, had

their own gods, and their own particular religious institutions, were persuaded by degrees, to admit into their worship a great number of the sacred rites and customs of their conquerors. The view of the Romans in this change, was not only to confirm their authority by the powerful aid of religion, but also to abolish the inhuman rites which were performed by many of the barbarous nations who had received their yoke; and this change was effected partly by the prudence of the victors, partly by the levity of the vanquished, and by their ambition to please their new masters.

When, from the sacred rites of the ancient Romans, we pass to a review of the other religions that prevailed in the world, we shall find, that the most remarkable may be properly divided into two classes, of which the one will comprehend the religious systems which owe their existence to *political* views; and the other, those which seemed to have been formed for *military* purposes. In the former class may be ranked the religions of most of the eastern nations, especially of the Persians, Egyptians, and Indians, which appear to have been solely calculated for the preservation of the state, the supporting of the royal authority and grandeur, the maintenance of public peace, and the advancement of civil virtues. Under the *military* class may be comprehended the religious system of the northern nations; since all the traditions that we find among the Germans, the Bretons, the Celts, and the Goths, concerning their divinities, have a manifest tendency to excite and nourish fortitude and ferocity, an insensibility of danger, and a contempt of life. An attentive inquiry into the religions of these respective nations, will abundantly verify what is here asserted.

None of these nations indeed, ever arrived at such an access of universal barbarity and ignorance, as not to have some discerning men among them, who were sensible of the extravagance of all these religions. But of these sagacious observers, some were destitute of the weight and authority that were necessary to remedy these overgrown evils; and others wanted the will to exert themselves in such a glorious cause. And the truth is, none of them had wisdom equal to such a solemn and arduous enterprise. This appears manifestly from the laborious, but useless efforts of some of the Greek and Roman philosophers against the vulgar superstitions. These venerable sages delivered

in their writings, many sublime things concerning the nature of God, and the duties incumbent upon men; they disputed with sagacity against the popular religion; but to all this they added such chimerical notions, and such absurd subtilties of their own as may serve to convince us that it belongs to God alone, and not to man, to reveal the truth without any mixture of impurity or error.

About the time of Christ's appearance upon earth, there were two kinds of philosophy which prevailed among the civilized nations. One was the philosophy of the Greeks, adopted also by the Romans; and the other that of the orientals, which had a great number of votaries in Persia, Syria, Chaldea, Egypt, and even among the Jews. The former was distinguished by the simple title of *philosophy*. The latter was honored with the more pompous appellation of *science* or *knowledge*, since those who embraced this latter sect pretended to be the restorers of the knowledge of God, which was lost in the world. The followers of both these systems, in consequence of vehement disputes and dissensions about several points, subdivided themselves into a variety of sects. It is, however, to be observed, that all the sects of the oriental philosophy deduced their various tenets from one fundamental principle, which they held in common; whereas the Greeks were much divided even about the first principles of science.

As we shall have occasion hereafter to speak of the oriental philosophy, we shall confine ourselves here to the doctrines taught by the Grecian sages, and shall give some account of the various sects into which they were divided.

Among the Grecian sects, there were some which declared openly against all religion; and others who, though they acknowledged a deity, and admitted a religion, yet cast a cloud over the truth, instead of exhibiting it in its genuine beauty and lustre.

Of the former kind were the epicureans and academics. The epicureans maintained, "that the world arose from chance; that the gods whose existence they did not dare to deny, neither did, nor could, extend their providential care to human affairs; that the soul was mortal; that *pleasure* was to be regarded as the ultimate end of man; and that *virtue* was neither worthy of esteem nor choice, but with a view to its attainment." The academics asserted the impossibility to arriving at truth, and held it uncertain, "wheth-

er the gods existed or not; whether the soul was mortal or immortal; whether virtue were preferable to vice, or vice to virtue." These two sects, though they struck at the foundations of all religion, were the most numerous of all others at the birth of Christ, and were particularly encouraged by the liberality of the rich and the protection of those in power.

We observed in the preceding section, that there was another kind of philosophy, in which religion was admitted, but which was, at the same time, deficient by the obscurity it cast upon truth. Under the philosophers of this class, may be reckoned the platonists, the stoics, and the followers of Aristotle, whose subtile disputations concerning God, religion, and the social duties, were of little solid use to mankind. The nature of God, as it is explained by Aristotle, is something like the principle that gives motion to a machine; it is a nature happy in the contemplation of itself, and entirely regardless of human affairs; and such a divinity, who differs but little from the god of Epicurus, cannot reasonably be the object either of love or fear. With respect to the doctrine of this philosopher concerning the human soul, it is uncertain, to say no more, whether he believed its immortality or not. What then could be expected from such a philosophy? could any thing solid and satisfactory in favor of piety and virtue, be hoped for from a system which excluded from the universe a divine Providence, and insinuated the mortality of the human soul?

The god of the stoics has somewhat more majesty, than the divinity of Aristotle; nor is he represented by those philosophers as sitting above the starry heavens in a supine indolence, and a perfect inattention to the affairs of the universe. Yet he is described as a corporeal being, united to matter by necessary connexion, and subject to the determination of an immutable *fate* so that neither rewards nor punishments can properly proceed from him. The learned also know that, in the philosophy of this sect, the existence of the soul was confined to a certain period of time. Now it is manifest, that these tenets remove, at once, the strongest motives to virtue, and the most powerful restraints upon vice; and, therefore the stoical system may be considered as a body of specious and pompous doctrine, but, at the same time, as a body without nerves, or any principles of consistence or vigor.

Plato is generally looked upon as superior to all the other philosophers in wisdom; and this eminent rank does not seem to have been undeservedly conferred upon him. He taught that the universe was governed by a being, glorious in power and wisdom, and possessed of a perfect liberty and independence. He extended also the views of mortals beyond the grave, and showed them, in futurity, prospects adapted to excite their hopes, and to work upon their fears. His doctrine, however, beside the weakness of the foundations on which it rests, and the obscurity with which it is often expressed, has likewise many other considerable defects. It represents the Supreme Creator of the world, as destitute of many perfections, and confined to a certain determinate portion of space. Its decisions, with respect to the soul, and demons, are too much adapted to beget and nourish superstition. Nor will the moral philosophy of Plato appear worthy of such a high degree of admiration, if we attentively examine and compare together its various parts and reduce them to their principles.

As then, in these different sects, there were many things maintained that were highly unreasonable and absurd; and as a contentious spirit of opposition and dispute prevailed among them all; certain men of true discernment, and of moderate characters, were of opinion, that none of these sects were to be adhered to in all matters, but that it was rather wise to choose and extract out of each of them such tenets and doctrines as were good and reasonable, and to abandon and reject the rest. This gave rise to a new form of philosophy in Egypt, and principally at Alexandria, which was called the eclectic, whose founder according to some, was Potamon, an Alexandrian, though this opinion is not without its difficulties. It appears manifestly from the testimony of Philo, the Jew, who was himself one of this sect, that this philosophy was in a flourishing state at Alexandria, when our Saviour was upon the earth. The eclectics held Plato in the highest esteem, though they made no scruple to join with his doctrines, whatever they thought conformable to reason in the tenets and opinions of the other philosophers.

The attentive reader will easily conclude, from the short view that we have here given of the miserable state of the world at the birth of Christ, that mankind, in this period of darkness and corruption, stood highly in need of some divine teacher to convey to the mind *true and certain principles* of re-

ligion and wisdom, and to recall wandering mortals to the sublime paths of piety and virtue. The consideration of this wretched condition of mankind will be also singularly useful to those who are not sufficiently acquainted with the advantages, the comforts, and the support, which the sublime doctrines of Christianity are so proper to administer in every state, relation, and circumstance of life. A set of miserable and unthinking creatures treat with negligence, nay sometimes with contempt, the religion of Jesus, not considering that they are indebted to it for all the good things which they so ungratefully enjoy.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS STATE OF THE JEWISH NATION AT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

The Jews under Herod the Great—Their state after his death—Their calamities increased by their priests and rulers—Their religion much corrupted among the people and their teachers—Their great sects divided on various points—But exercised mutual forbearance with each other—The Essenes—The Therapeutæ—The moral doctrine of those sects—The state of the multitude—The Cabbala, a source of error among the Jews—Divine worship corrupted by vain rites and human inventions—The causes of corruption among the Jews—Yet some remains of piety—The Samaritans—The Jews out of Palestine.

The state of the Jews was not much better than that of the other nations at the time of Christ's appearance in the world. They were governed by Herod, who was himself a tributary to the Roman people. This prince was surnamed the Great, surely from no other circumstance than the greatness of his vices, and his government was a yoke of the most vexatious and oppressive kind. By a cruel, suspicious and overbearing temper, he drew upon himself the aversion of all, not excepting those who lived upon his bounty. By a mad luxury and an affectation of magnificence far above his fortune, together with the most profuse and immoderate largesses, he exhausted the treasures of that miserable nation. Under his administration, and by his means, the Roman luxury was received in Palestine, accompanied with the worst vices of that licentious people. In a word, Judea, governed by Herod, groaned under all that corruption, which might

be expected from the authority and example of a prince, who, though a Jew in outward profession, was, in point of morals and practice, a contemner of all laws human and divine.

After the death of this tyrant, the Romans divided the government of Palestine between his sons. In this division the one half of Judea was given to Archelaus, with the title of exarch; and the other was divided between his two brothers, Antipas and Philip. Archelaus was a corrupt and wicked prince, and followed the example of his father's crimes in such a manner, that the Jews, grown weary of his iniquitous administration, laid their complaints and grievances before Augustus, who delivered them from their oppressor, by banishing him from his dominions, about ten years after the death of Herod the Great. The kingdom of this dethroned prince was reduced to the form of a province, and added to the jurisdiction of the governor of Syria, to the great detriment of the Jews, whose heaviest calamities were owing to this change and whose final destruction was its undoubted effect in the appointment of Providence.

However severe the authority was, which the Romans exercised over the Jews, yet it did not extend to the entire suppression of all their civil and religious privileges. The Jews were, in some measure, governed by their own laws, and they were permitted the enjoyment of the religion they had received from the glorious founder of their church and state. The administration of religious ceremonies was committed, as before, to the highpriest, and to the sanhedrim; to the former of whom the order of the priests and levites was in the usual subordination; and the form of outward worship, except in a very few points, had suffered no visible change.—But, on the other hand, it is impossible to express the inquietude and disgust, the calamities and vexations, which this unhappy nation suffered from the presence of the Romans, whom their religion obliged them to look upon as a polluted and idolatrous people, and in a more particular manner, from the avarice and cruelty of the pretors, and the frauds, and extortions of the publicans. So that all things considered, their condition, who lived under the government of the other sons of Herod, was much more supportable than the state of those, who were immediately subject to the Roman jurisdiction.

It was not, however, from the Romans alone, that the ca-

lamities of this miserable people proceeded. Their own rulers multiplied their vexations, and hindered them from enjoying any little comforts that were left to them by the Roman magistrates. The leaders of the people, and the chief priests, were, according to the account of Josephus, profligate wretches who had purchased their places by bribes, or by acts of iniquity, and who maintained their ill acquired authority by the most flagitious and abominable crimes. The subordinate and inferior members were infected with the corruption of the head; the priests, and those who possessed any shadow of authority, were become dissolute and abandoned to the highest degree; while the multitude, set on by these corrupt examples, ran headlong into every sort of iniquity, and by their endless seditions, robberies, and extortions, armed against them both the justice of God, and the vengeance of men.

Two religions flourished at this time in Palestine, viz. the Jewish and the Samaritan, whose respective followers beheld those of the opposite sect with the utmost aversion. The Jewish religion stands exposed to our view in the books of the Old Testament; but at the time of Christ's appearance, it had lost much of its original nature, and of its primitive aspect. Errors of a very pernicious kind had infected the whole body of the people, and the more learned part of the nation were divided upon points of the highest consequence. All looked for a deliverer, but not for such a one as God had promised. Instead of a meek and spiritual Savior, they expected a formidable and warlike prince, to break off their chains, and set them at liberty from the Roman yoke. All regarded the whole of religion, as consisting in the rites appointed by Moses, and in the performance of some external acts of duty toward the Gentiles. They were all horribly unanimous in excludiug from the hopes of eternal life all the other nations of the world; and, as a consequence of this odious system, they treated them with the utmost rigour and inhumanity, when any occasion was offered them. And beside these corrupt and vicious principles, there prevailed among them several absurd and superstitious notions concerning the divine nature, invisible powers, magic, &c. which they had partly brought with them from the Babylonian captivity, and partly derived from the Egyptians, Syrians, and Arabians, who lived in their neighborhood.

Religion had not a better fate among the learned than a-

mong the multitude. The supercilious teachers, who vaunted their profound knowledge of the law, and their deep science in spiritual and divine things, were constantly showing their fallibillity and their ignorance by their religious differences, and were divided into a great variety of sects. Of these sects three have, in a great measure, eclipsed the rest, both by the number of their adherents, and also by the weight and authority which they acquired. These were the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the Essenes. There is frequent mention made of the two former in the sacred writings; but the knowledge of the rites and doctrines of the latter is to be derived from Josephus, Philo, and other historians. These three illustrious sects agreed in the fundamental principles of the Jewish religion, while at the same time, they were involved in endless disputes upon points of the highest importance, and about matters in which the salvation of mankind was directly concerned; and their controversies could not but be highly detrimental to the rude and illiterate multitude, as every one must easily perceive.

It may not be improper to mention here some of the principal matters that were debated among these famous sects. One of the main points of controversy was; *whether the* WRITTEN LAW *alone was of divine authority.* The Pharisees added to this *law* another, which had been received by oral tradition. This the Sadducees and Essenes rejected as of no authority, and adhered to the *written law* as the only divine rule of obedience. They differed also in their opinions concerning the true *sense of the law.* For, while the Pharisees attributed to the sacred text a double sense, one of which was obvious, regarding only the *words*, and another mysterious, relating to the intimate nature of the *things* expressed; and while the Sadducees maintained that nothing further was delivered by the law, than that which was contained in the signification of the words; the Essenes, at least the greatest part of that sect, entertained an opinion different from both of these. They asserted, in their jargon, that the words of the law were absolutely void of all power, and that the things expressed by them, were the images of holy and celestial objects. These litigious subtilities and unintelligible wranglings, about the nature and sense of the divine word, were succeeded by a controversy of the greatest moment, concerning the rewards and punishments of the law, particularly with respect to their extent. The Phari-

sees were of opinion, that these rewards and punishments extended both to the soul and body, and that their duration was prolonged beyond the limits of transitory state. The Sadducees assigned to them the same period that concludes this mortal life. The Essenes differed from both; and maintained that future rewards and punishments extended to the soul alone, and not to the body, which they considered as a mass of malignant matter, and as the prison of the immortal spirit.

These differences, in matters of such vast consequence, between the three famous sects above mentioned, produced none of those injurious and malignant effects, which are too often seen to arise from religious controversies. But such as have any acquaintance with the history of these times, will not be so far deceived by this specious appearance of moderation, as to attribute it to noble or generous principles. They will look through the fair outside, and see that their mutual fears of each other were the latent reason of this apparent charity and mutual forbearance. The Sadducees enjoyed the favor and protection of the great. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were extremely high in the esteem of the multitude. And hence they were both secured against the attempts of each other, and lived in peace, notwithstanding the diversity of their religious sentiments.—The government of the Romans contributed also to the maintenance of this mutual toleration and tranquility, as they were ever ready to suppress and punish whatever had the appearance of tumult and sedition. We may add to all this, that the Sadducean principles rendered that sect naturally averse to all sorts of altercation and tumult. Libertinism has for its objects ease and pleasure, and chooses rather to slumber in the arms of a fallacious security, than to expose itself to the painful activity, which is required both in the search and in the defence of truth.

The Essenes had little occasion to quarrel with the other sects, as they dwelt generally in a rural solitude, far removed from the view and commerce of men. This singular sect, which was spread abroad through Syria, Egypt, and the neighboring countries, maintained, that religion consisted wholly in contemplation and silence. By a rigorous abstinence also, and a variety of penitential exercises and mortifications, which they seem to have borrowed from the Egyptians, they endeavored to arrive at still higher degrees of perfection in virtue. There prevailed, however,

among the members of this sect, a considerable difference both in point of opinion and discipline. Some passed their lives in a state of celibacy, and employed their time in educating and instructing the children of others. Others embraced the state of matrimony, which they considered as lawful, when entered into with the sole design of propagating the species, and not to satisfy the demands of lust. Those of the Essenes who dwelt in Syria, held the possibility of appeasing the Deity by sacrifices, though in a manner quite different from that of the Jews; by which, however, it appears that they had not utterly rejected the literal sense of the Mosaic law. But those who wandered in the deserts of Egypt were of very different sentiments; they maintained, that no offering was acceptable to God but that of a serene and composed mind, addicted to the contemplation of divine things; and it is manifest from hence, that they looked upon the law of Moses as an allegorical system of spiritual and mysterious truths, and renounced in its explication all regard to the outward letter.

The Therapeutæ, of whom Philo the Jew makes particular mention in his treatise concerning *contemplative life*, are supposed to have been a branch of this sect. From this notion arose the division of the Essenes into *theoretical* and *practical*. The former of these were wholly devoted to contemplation, and are the same with the Therapeutæ; while the latter employed a part of their time in the performance of the duties of active life. Whether this division be accurate or not, is a matter which I will not take upon me to determine. But I see nothing in the laws or manners of the Therapeutæ, that should lead us to consider them as a branch of the Essenes; nor indeed has Philo asserted any such thing. There may have been, surely, many other fanatical tribes among the Jews, beside that of the Essenes; nor should a resemblance of principles always induce us to make a coalition of sects. It is however, certain, that the Therapeutæ were neither christians nor Egyptians, as some have erroneously imagined. They were undoubtedly Jews; nay, they gloried in that title, and styled themselves, with particular affectation, the true disciples of Moses, though their manner of life was equally repugnant to the institutions of that great lawgiver and to the dictates of right reason, and showed them to be a tribe of melancholy and wrongheaded enthusiasts.

None of these sects, indeed, seemed to have the interests of real and true piety at heart; nor were their principles and discipline at all adapted to the advancement of pure and substantial virtue. The Pharisees courted popular applause by a vain ostentation of pretended sanctity, and an austere method of living while in reality, they were strangers to true holiness, and were inwardly defiled with the most criminal dispositions, with which our Savior frequently reproaches them. They also treated with more veneration the commandments and tradition of men, than the sacred precepts and laws of God. The Sadducees, by denying a future state of rewards and punishments, removed, at once, the most powerful incentives to virtue, and the most effectual restraints upon vice, and thus gave new vigor to every sinful passion, and a full encouragement to the indulgence of every irregular desire. As to the Essenes, they were a fanatical and superstitious tribe, who placed religion in a certain sort of seraphic indolence, and, looking upon piety to God as incompatible with any social attachment to men, dissolved, by this pernicious doctrine, all the great bonds of human society.

While then such darkness, such errors and dissensions prevailed among those, who assumed the character and authority of persons distinguished by their superior sanctity and wisdom, it will not be difficult to imagine, how totally corrupt the religion and morals of the multitude must have been. They were, accordingly, sunk in the most deplorable ignorance of God, and of divine things; and had no notion of any other way of rendering themselves acceptable to the Supreme Being, than by sacrifices, washings, and the other external rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Hence proceeded that dissolution of manners, and that profligate wickedness, which prevailed among the Jews, during Christ's ministry upon earth. And hence the Divine Savior compares that people to a flock of sheep, which wandered without a shepherd; and their teachers to men, who, though deprived themselves of sight, yet pretended to show the way to others.

To all these corruptions, both in point of doctrine and practice, which reigned among the Jews at the time of Christ's coming, we may add the attachment which many of them discovered to the tenets of the oriental philosophy concerning the origin of the world, and to the doctrine of

the Cabbala, which was undoubtedly derived from thence. That considerable numbers of the Jews imbibed the errors of this fantastic system, appears evidently, both from the books of the New Testament, and from the ancient history of the christian church; and it is also certain, that many of the gnostic sects were founded by Jews. Those among that degenerate people, who adopted this chimerical philosophy, must have differed vastly from the rest in their opinions concerning the God of the Old Testament, the origin of the world, the character and doctrine of Moses, and the nature and ministry of the Messiah; since they maintained, that the creator of this world was a being different from the Supreme God, and that his dominion over the human race was to be destroyed by the Messiah. Every one must see that this enormous system was fruitful of errors, destructive of the very foundation of Judaism.

If any part of the Jewish religion was less disfigured and corrupted than the rest, it was certainly the form of external worship which was established by the law of Moses. And yet many learned men have observed, that a great variety of rites were introduced into the service of the temple, of which no traces are to be found in the sacred writings. The institution of these additional ceremonies was manifestly owing to those changes and revolutions, which rendered the Jews more conversant with the nations round about them, than they had formerly been. For when they saw the sacred rites of the Greeks and Romans, they were taken with several of the ceremonies that were used in the worship of the heathen deities, and did not hesitate to adopt them in the service of the true God, and add them as an ornament to the rites which they had received by divine appointment.

But whence such enormous degrees of corruption in that very nation which God had, in a peculiar manner, separated from an idolatrous world to be the depositary of divine truth? Various causes may be assigned, in order to give a satisfactory account of this matter. First, it is certain, that the ancestors of those Jews, who lived in the time of our Savior, had brought from Chaldea, and the neighboring countries, many extravagant and idle fancies, which were utterly unknown to the original founders of the nation.—The conquest of Asia, by Alexander the Great, was also an event from which we may date a new accession of errors

to the Jewish system; since, in consequence of that revolution, the manners and opinions of the Greeks began to spread themselves among the Persians, Syrians, Arabians, and likewise among the Jews, who, before that period, were entirely unacquainted with letters and philosophy. We may further rank among the causes that contributed to corrupt the religion and manners of the Jews, their voyages into the adjacent countries, especially Egypt and Phenicia, in pursuit of wealth. For with the treasures of these corrupt and superstitious nations, they brought home also their pernicious errors, and their idle fictions, which were imperceptibly blended with their religious system. Nor ought we to omit, in this enumeration, the pestilential influence of the wicked reigns of Herod and his sons, and the enormous instances of idolatry, error and licentiousness, which this unhappy people had constantly before their eyes in the religion and manners of the Roman Governors and soldiers, which no doubt contributed much to the progress of their national superstition and corruption of manners. We might add here many more facts and circumstances, to illustrate further the matter under consideration; but these will be readily suggested to such as have the least acquaintance with the Jewish history from the time of the Maccabees.

It is indeed worthy of observation, that corrupted as the Jews were with the errors and superstition of the neighboring nations, they still preserved a zealous attachment to the law of Moses, and were extremely careful that it should not suffer any diminution of its credit or lose any the least degree of that veneration, that was due to its divine authority. Hence *synagogues* were erected throughout the province of Judea, in which the people assembled for the purposes of divine worship, and to hear their teachers interpret and explain the holy scriptures. There were, beside, in the more populous towns, public schools, in which learned men were appointed to instruct the youth in the knowledge of divine things, and also in other branches of science. And it is beyond all doubt, that these institutions contributed to maintain the laws in its primitive authority, and to stem the torrent of abounding iniquity.

The Samaritans, who celebrated divine worship in the temple that was built on mount Gerizim, lay under the burden of the same evils that oppressed the Jews, with whom they lived in the bitterest enmity, and were also,

like them, highly instrumental in increasing their own calamities. We learn from the most authentic histories of those times, that the Samaritans suffered as much as the Jews, from troubles and divisions fomented by the intrigues of factious spirits, though their religious sects were yet less numerous than those of the latter. Their religion, also, was much more corrupted than that of the Jews, as Christ himself declares in his conversation with the woman of Samaria; though it appears, at the same time, that their notions concerning the offices and ministry of the Messiah, were, much more just and conformable to truth, than those which were entertained at Jerusalem. Upon the whole it is certain, that the Samaritans mixed the profane errors of the Gentiles, with the sacred doctrines of the Jews, and were excessively corrupted by the idolatrous customs of the pagan nations.

The Jews multiplied so prodigiously, that the narrow bounds of Palestine were no longer sufficient to contain them. They poured, therefore, their increasing numbers into the neighboring countries, and that with such rapidity, that, at the time of Christ's birth, there was scarcely a province in the empire, where they were not found carrying on commerce, and exercising other lucrative arts. They were maintained in foreign countries, against injurious treatment and violence by the special edicts and protection of the magistrates; and this, indeed, was absolutely necessary, since in most places, the remarkable difference of their religion and manners, from those of the other nations, exposed them to the hatred and indignation of the ignorant and bigotted multitude. All this appears to have been most singularly and wisely directed by the adorable hand of an interposing Providence, to the end that this people, which was the sole depositary of the true religion, and of the knowledge of one Supreme God, being spread abroad through the whole earth, might be every where, by their example, a reproach to superstition, contribute in some measure to check it, and thus prepare the way for that yet fuller discovery of divine truth, which was to shine upon the world from the ministry and gospel of the Son of God.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING THE LIFE AND ACTIONS OF JESUS CHRIST.

The birth of Christ—His infancy and youth—John the Baptist—The Life of Christ—Election of his Apostles—Why twelve and seventy Disciples—The fame of Christ abroad—His ministry—His death and resurrection.

The errors and disorders that we have now been considering, required something far above human wisdom and power to dispel and remove them, and to deliver mankind from the miserable state to which they were reduced by them. Therefore, toward the conclusion of the reign of Herod the Great, the Son of God descended upon earth, and, taking upon him the human nature, appeared to men under the sublime characters of an infallible teacher, an all-sufficient mediator, and a spiritual and immortal king. The place of his birth was Bethlehem, in the land of Palestine. The year in which it happened, has not hitherto been fixed with certainty, notwithstanding the deep and laborious researches of the learned on that matter. There is nothing surprising in this, when we consider that the first Christians labored under the same difficulties, and were divided in their opinions, concerning the time of Christ's birth. That which appears most probable, is, that it happened about a year and six months before the death of Herod, in the year of Rome 748 or 749. The uncertainty, however, of this point is of no sort of consequence. We know that the Sun of Righteousness has shone upon the world. And, though we cannot fix the precise period in which he arose, this will not hinder us from enjoying the direction and influence of his vital and salutary beams.

Four inspired writers, who have transmitted to us an account of the life and actions of Jesus Christ, mention particularly his birth, his lineage, his family, and his parents; but they say very little concerning his infancy and his earlier youth. Not long after his birth, he was conducted by his parents into Egypt, that he might be there out of the reach of Herod's cruelty. When he was but twelve years old, he disputed, in the temple, with the most learned teachers, concerning the sublime truths of religion. And the rest of his life, until the thirtieth year of his age, was spent in the obscurity of a private condition, and consecrated to the

duties of filial obedience. This is all that the wisdom of God has permitted us to know, with certainty, of Christ, before he entered upon his public ministry; nor is the story of his having followed the trade of his adopted father Joseph built upon any sure foundation. There have been, indeed, several writers, who either through the levity of a wanton imagination, or with a design to attract the admiration of the multitude, have invented a series of the most extravagant and ridiculous fables, in order to give an account of this obscure part of the Saviour's life.

Jesus began his public ministry in the thirtieth year of his age; and to render it more solemn and affecting to the Jews, a man, whose name was John, the Son of a Jewish priest, a person of great gravity also, and much respected on account of the austere dignity of his life and manners, was commanded by God to proclaim to the people the coming of the Messiah, that had been promised to their fathers. This extraordinary man called himself the forerunner of the Messiah. Filled with a holy zeal and a divine fervor, he cried aloud to the Jewish nation to depart from their transgressions, and to purify their hearts, that they might thus partake of the blessings, which the Son of God was now come to offer to the world. The exhortations of this respectable messenger were not without effect; and those who, moved by his solemn admonitions, had formed the resolution of correcting their evil dispositions and amending their lives, were initiated into the kingdom of the Redeemer by the ceremony of immersion or baptism. Christ himself, before he began his ministry, desired to be solemnly baptised by John, in the waters of Jordan, that he might not, in any point, neglect to answer the demands of the Jewish law.

It is not necessary to enter here into a particular detail of the life and actions of Jesus Christ. All Christians must be perfectly well acquainted with them. They must know, that during the space of three years, and amid the deepest trials of affliction and distress, he instructed the Jewish nation in the will and counsels of the Most High, and omitted nothing in the course of his ministry, that could contribute either to gain the multitude, or to charm the wise. Every one knows, that his life was a continued scene of the most perfect sanctity, and the purest and most active virtue: not only without spot, but also beyond the reach of suspicion. And it is also well known, that by miracles of the most stupendous kind,

and not more stupendous than salutary and beneficent, he displayed to the universe the truth of that religion which he brought with him from above, and demonstrated the reality of his divine commission in the most illustrious manner.

As this divine religion was to be propogated to the utmost ends of the earth, it was necessary that Christ should choose a certain number of persons, to accompany him constantly through the whole course of his ministry; that thus they might be faithful and respectable witnesses of the sanctity of his life, and the grandeur of his miracles, to the remotest nations; and also transmit to the latest posterity a genuine account of his sublime doctrines, and of the nature and end of the gospel dispensation. Therefore Jesus chose, out of the multitude that attended his discourses, twelve persons, whom he separated from the rest by the name of Apostles. These men were illiterate, poor, and of mean extraction, and such alone were truly proper to answer the views of the divine Saviour. He avoided making use of the ministry of persons endowed with the advantages of fortune and birth, or enriched with the treasures of eloquence and learning, lest the fruits of this embassy, and the progress of the gospel, should be attributed to human and natural causes. These Apostles were sent but once to preach to the Jews during the life of Christ. He chose to keep them about his own person, that they might be thoroughly instructed in the affairs of his kingdom. That the multitude, however, might not be destitute of teachers to enlighten them with the knowledge of the truth, Christ appointed seventy disciples to preach the glad tidings of life eternal throughout the whole province of Judea.

The researches of the learned have been employed to find out the reason of Christ's fixing the number of the apostles to *twelve*, and that of the disciples to *seventy;* and various conjectures have been applied to the solution of this question. But since it is manifest from the words of our Saviour himself, that he intended the number of the twelve apostles as an allusion to that of the tribes of Israel; it can scarcely be doubted, that he was willing to insinuate by this appointment, that he was the supreme lord and high priest of these twelve tribes, into which the Jewish nation was divided. And as the number of disciples answers evidently to that of the senators, of whom the counsel of the people, or the sanhedrim, was composed, there is a high degree of probability in the conjecture of those, who think that Christ, by the choice

of the *seventy*, designed to admonish the Jews that the authority of their sanhedrim was now at an end, and that all power, with respect to religious matters, was vested in him alone.

The ministry of the divine Saviour was confined to the Jews; nor while he remained upon earth did he permit his apostles or disciples to extend their labors beyond this distinguished nation. At the same time if we consider the illustrious acts of mercy and omnipotence, that were performed by Christ, it will be natural to conclude, that his fame must have been very soon spread abroad in other countries. We learn from writers of no small note, that Abgarus king of Edessa, being seized with a severe and dangerous illness, wrote to our blessed Lord to implore his assistance; and that Jesus not only sent him a gracious answer, but also accompanied it with his picture, as a mark of his esteem for that pious prince. These letters are still extant. But they are justly looked upon as fictitious by most writers, who also go yet farther, and treat the whole story of Abgarus as entirely fabulous, and unworthy of credit. I will not pretend to assert the genuineness of these letters; but I see no reason of sufficient weight to destroy the credibility of the whole story which is supposed to have given occasion to them.

A great number of the Jews, struck with those illustrious marks of a divine authority and power, that shone forth in the ministry and actions of Christ, regarded him as the Son of God, the true Messiah. The rulers of the people, and more especially the chief priests and Pharisees, whose licentiousness and hypocrisy he censured with a noble and generous freedom, labored with success, by the help of their passions, to extinguish in their breasts the conviction of his celestial mission; or, at least, to suppress the effects it was adapted to produce upon their conduct. Fearing also lest the ministry of Christ should tend to diminish their credit, and to deprive them of the advantages they derived from the impious abuse of their authority in religious matters; they laid snares for his life, which for a considerable time were without effect. They succeeded at length by the infernal treason of an apostate disciple, by the treachery of Judas, who discovered the retreat which his divine master had chosen for the purposes of meditation and repose, and thus delivered him into the merciless hands of a brutal soldiery.

In consequence of this, Jesus was brought before the Jewish

high-priest and sanhedrim, before whom he was accused of having violated the law, and blasphemed the majesty of God. Dragged from thence to the tribunal of Pilate the Roman prætor, he was there charged with seditious enterprises, and with treason against Cæsar. Both these accusations were so evidently false and destitute even of every appearance of truth, that they must have been rejected by any judge, who acted upon the principles of common equity. But the clamors of an enraged populace, set on by the impious instigations of their priests and rulers, intimidated Pilate, and engaged him, though with the utmost reluctance, and in opposition to the dictates of his conscience, to pronounce a capital sentence against Christ. The divine Saviour behaved with inexpressible dignity under this heavy trial. As the end of his mission was to make expiation for the sins of men, so when all things were ready, and when he had finished the work of his glorious ministry, he placidly submitted to the death of the cross, and with a serene and voluntary resignation, committed his spirit into the hands of the Father.

After Jesus had remained three days in the sepulchre, he resumed that life which he had voluntarily laid down; and rising from the dead, declared to the universe, by that triumphant act, that the divine justice was satisfied, and the paths of salvation and immortality rendered accessible to the human race. He conversed with his disciples during forty days after his resurrection, and employed that time in instructing them more fully concerning the nature of his kingdom. Many wise and important reasons prevented his showing himself publicly at Jerusalem, to confound the malignity and unbelief of his enemies. He contented himself with manifesting the certainty of his glorious resurrection, to a sufficient number of faithful and credible witnesses; foreseeing, perhaps, that if he appeared in public, those malicious unbelievers who had formerly attributed his miracles to the power of magic, would now represent his resurrection, as a phantom or vision, produced by the influence of infernal powers. After having remained upon earth during the space of time above mentioned, and given to his disciples a divine commission to preach the glad tidings of salvation and immortality to the human race, he ascended into heaven, in their presence, and resumed the enjoyment of that glory of which he was possessed before the worlds were created.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING THE PROSPEROUS EVENTS THAT HAPPENED TO THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

The Apostles filled with the Holy Ghost—The election of a new Apostle—Paul called—The church of Jerusalem—Churches founded by the Apostles in different places—The heathen respect Christ—Causes of the rapid spread of Christianity—Miraculous gifts—The progress of the gospel ascribed to absurd causes.

Jesus, being ascended into heaven, soon showed his afflicted disciples, that, though invisible to mortal eyes, he was still their omnipotent protector, and their benevolent guide. About fifty days after his departure from them, he gave them the first proof of that majesty and power to which he was exalted, by the effusion of the Holy Ghost upon them according to his promise. The consequences of this grand event were surprising and glorious, infinitely honorable to the christian religion and the divine mission of its triumphant author. For no sooner had the apostles received this precious gift, this celestial guide, than their ignorance was turned into light, their doubts into certainty, their fears into a firm and invincible fortitude, and their former backwardness into an ardent and inextinguishable zeal, which led them to undertake their sacred office with the utmost intrepidiy and alacrity of mind. This marvellous event was attended with a variety of gifts; particularly the gift of tongues, so indispensably necessary to qualify the apostles to preach the gospel to the different nations. These holy apostles were also filled with a perfect persuasion, founded on Christ's express promise, that the divine presence would perpetually accompany them, and show itself by miraculous interpositions, as often as the success of their ministry should render this necessary.

Relying upon these celestial succors, the apostles began their glorious ministry, by preaching the gospel, according to Christ's positive command, first to the Jews, and by endeavoring to bring that deluded people to the knowledge of the truth. Nor were their labors unsuccessful, since, in a very short time, many thousands were converted, by the influence of their ministry, to the christian faith. From the Jews they passed to the Samaritans, to whom they preached with such efficacy, that great numbers of that nation ac-

knowledged the Messiah. And after that they had exercised their ministry, during several years, at Jerusalem, and brought to a sufficient degree of consistence and maturity the christian churches which were founded in Palestine and the adjacent countries, they extended their views further, carried the divine lamp of the gospel to all the nations of the world, and saw their labors crowned, almost every where, with the most abundant fruits.

No sooner was Christ exalted on high, than the apostles, determined to render their number complete, as it had been fixed by their divine master, and accordingly to choose, in the place of Judas, who had desperately perished by his own hands, a man endowed with such degrees of sanctity and wisdom as were necessary in a station of such vast importance. Having therefore gathered together the small assembly of Christians which then had been formed at Jerusalem, two men remarkable for their piety and faith, were proposed as the most worthy to stand candidates for this sacred office. These men were Matthias and Barnabas, the former of whom was, either by lot, which is the most general opinion, or by a plurality of voices of the assembly there present, chosen to the dignity of an apostle.

All these apostles were men without education, and absolutely ignorant of letters and philosophy; and yet in the infancy of the Christian church, it was necessary that there should be, at least, some one defender of the gospel, who versed in the learned arts, might be able to combat the Jewish teachers and the Pagan philosophers with their own arms. For this purpose, Jesus himself, by an extraordinary voice from Heaven, called to his service a thirteenth apostle, whose name was Saul, afterward Paul, and whose acquaintance both with Jewish and Grecian learning was very considerable. This extraordinary man, who had been one of the most virulent enemies of the Christians, became their most glorious and triumphant defender. Independent of the miraculous gifts with which he was enriched, he was naturally possessed of an invincible courage, an amazing force of genius, and a spirit of patience, which no fatigue could overcome, and which no sufferings or trials could exhaust. To these the cause of the gospel, under the divine appointment, owed a considerable part of its rapid progress and surprising success, as the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Epistles of St. Paul*, abundantly testify.

The first christian church founded by the apostles was that of Jerusalem, which was the model of all those that were afterward erected during this first century. This church was, however, governed by the apostles themselves, to whom the *elders*, and those who were entrusted with the care of the poor, even the *deacons*, were subject. The people, though they had not abandoned the Jewish worship, held, however, separate assemblies, in which they were instructed by the apostles and elders, prayed together, celebrated the holy supper, in remembrance of Christ, of his death and sufferings, and the salvation offered to mankind through him; and at the conclusion of these meetings, they testified their mutual love, partly by their liberality to the poor, and partly by sober and friendly repasts, which from thence were called *feasts of charity*. Among the virtues which distinguished the rising church in this its infancy, that of charity to the poor and needy shone in the first rank, and with the brightest lustre. The rich supplied the wants of their indigent brethren, with such liberality and readiness, that, as St. Luke tells us, among the primitive disciples of Christ, all things were *in common*. This expression has, however, been greatly abused, and has been made to signify a *community of rights, goods, or possessions*, than which interpretation nothing is more groundless, nothing more false. For, from a multitude of reasons, as well as from the express words of St. Peter, it is abundantly manifest, that the community, which is implied in mutual *use* and liberality, is the only thing intended in this passage.

The apostles, having finished their work at Jerusalem, went from thence to employ their labors in other nations, traveled with this view over a great part of the known world, and in a short time planted a vast number of churches among the Gentiles. Several of these are mentioned in the sacred writings, particularly in the *Acts of the Apostles;* these are, undoubtedly, but a small part of the churches which were founded either by the apostles themselves, or by their disciples, under their immediate direction. The distance of time and the want of records, leave us at a loss with respect to many interesting circumstances of the peregrinations of the apostles; nor have we any certain or precise accounts of the limits of their voyages, of the particular countries where they sojourned, nor of the times and places in which they finished their glorious course. The stories that

are told of their arrival and exploits among the Gauls, the English, the Spaniards, the Germans, the Americans, the Chinese, the Indians, and the Russians, are too romantic in their nature, and of too recent a date, to be received by an impartial inquirer after truth. The greatest part of these fables were forged after the time of Charlemagne, when most of the christian churches contended about the antiquity of their origin, with as much vehemence as the Arcadians, Egyptians, and Greeks, disputed formerly about their seniority and precedence.

At the same time, the beauty and excellence of the christian religion excited the admiration of the thinking part of mankind, wherever the apostles directed their course. Many who were not willing to adopt the whole of its doctrines, were nevertheless, as appears from undoubted records, so struck with the account of Christ's life and actions, and so charmed with the sublime purity of his precepts, that they ranked him in the number of the greatest heroes, nay even of the gods themselves. Great numbers kept, with the utmost care, in their houses, pictures or images of the divine Savior and his apostles, which they treated with the highest marks of veneration and respect. And so illustrious was the fame of Christ's power grown, after his resurrection from the dead, and the miraculous gifts shed from on high upon his apostles, that the emperor Tiberius is said to have proposed his being enrolled among the gods of Rome, which the opposition of the Senate hindered from taking effect. Many have doubted of the truth of this story; there are, however, several authors of the first note, who have declared that the reasons alleged for the truth of this fact, are such as have removed their doubts, and appeared to them satisfactory and conclusive.

When we consider the rapid progress of Christianity, among the Gentile nations, and the poor and feeble instruments by which this great and amazing event was immediately effected, we must naturally have recourse to an omnipotent and invisible hand, as its true and proper cause. For unless we suppose here a divine interposition, how was it possible that men destitute of all human aid, without credit or riches, learning, or eloquence, could, in so short a time, persuade a considerable part of mankind to abandon the religion of their ancestors? How was it possible that a handful of apostles, who, as fishermen and publicans, must

have been contemned by their own nation, and as Jews must have been odious to all others, could engage the learned and the mighty, as well as the simple, and those of low degree, to forsake their favorite prejudices, and to embrace a new religion which was an enemy to their corrupt passions? And, indeed, there were undoubted marks of a celestial power perpetually attending their ministry. There was, in their very language an incredible energy, an amazing power of sending light into the understanding and conviction into the heart. To this were added the commanding influence of stupendous miracles, the foretelling of future events, the power of discerning the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart, a magnanimity superior to all difficulties, a contempt of riches and honors, a serene tranquillity in the face of death, and invincible patience under torments still more dreadful than death itself; and all this accompanied with lives free from all stain, and adorned with the constant practice of sublime virtue: Thus were the messengers of the divine Savior, the heralds of his spiritual and immortal kingdom, furnished for their glorious work, as the unanimous voice of ancient history so loudly testified. The event sufficiently declares this; for without these remarkable and extraordinary circumstances, no rational account can be given of the rapid propagation of the gospel throughout the world.

What indeed contributed still further to this glorious event was the power vested in the apostles of transmitting to their disciples these miraculous gifts. For many of the first christians were no sooner baptized, according to Christ's appointment, and dedicated to the service of God by solemn prayer and the imposition of hands, than they spoke languages they had never known or learned before; foretold future events, healed the sick by pronouncing the name of Jesus, restored the dead to life, and performed many things, above the reach of human power. And it is no wonder if men, who had the power of communicating to others these marvelous gifts, appeared great and respectable, wherever they exercised their glorious ministry.

Such then were the true causes of that amazing rapidity with which the christian religion spread itself upon earth; and those who pretend to assign other reasons of this surprising event, indulge themselves in idle fictions, which must disgust every attentive observer of men and things. In vain

therefore have some imagined, that the extraordinary liberality of the christians to their poor, was a temptation to the more indolent and corrupt part of the multitude to embrace the gospel. Such malignant and superficial reasoners do not consider that those who embraced this divine religion exposed their lives to the most imminent danger; nor have they attention enough to recollect, that neither lazy nor vicious members were suffered to remain in the society of Christians. Equally in vain is the invention of those who imagine that the profiigate lives of the heathen priests was an occasion of the conversion of many to christianity. For, though this might indeed give them a disgust at the religion of these unworthy ministers, yet it could not, alone, attach them to that of Jesus, which offered them from the world no other prospects than those of poverty, infamy, and death. The person who could embrace the gospel solely from the motive now mentioned, must have reasoned in this senseless and extravagant manner: "the ministers of that religion which I have professed from my infancy, lead profligate lives; therefore I will become a Christian, join myself to that body of men who are condemned by the laws of the State, and thus expose my life and fortune to the most imminent danger,"

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THE CALAMITOUS EVENTS THAT HAPPENED TO THE CHURCH.

The Jews persecute the Christians at home and abroad—but were severely punished for their cruel treatment of Christians—heathen persecute the Christians in ten persecutions—laws against Christians—the cause of persecution—other causes—slanders spread against the Christians—judicial proceedings against them—martyrs—their number—their lives and actions—persecution under Nero—its extent—persecution under Domitian.

The innocence and virtue that distinguished so eminently the lives of Christ's servants, and the spotless purity of the doctrine they taught, were not sufficient to defend them against the virulence and malignity of the Jews. The priests and rulers of that abandoned people not only loaded with reproach the apostles of Jesus and their disciples, but condemned as many of them as they could to death, and executed in the most irregular and barbarous manner their sanguinary decrees. The murder of Stephen, of James, the son of Zebedee, sirnamed the Just, bishop of Jerusalem,

furnish dreadful examples of the truth of what we here advance. This odious malignity of the Jewish teachers against the heralds of the gospel, was doubtless owing to a secret apprehension that the progress of christianity would destroy the credit of Judaism, and bring on the ruin of their pompous ceremonies.

The Jews who lived out of Palestine, in the Roman provinces, did not yield to those of Jerusalem, in point of cruelty to the innocent disciples of Christ. We learn from the history of the *Acts of the Apostles*, and other records of unquestionable authority, that they spared no labor, but zealously seized every occasion of animating the magistrates against the Christians, and setting on the multitude to demand their destruction. The highpriest of the nation, and the Jews who dwelt in Palestine, were instrumental in exciting the rage of these foreign Jews against the infant church by sending messengers to exhort them not only to avoid all intercourse with the Christians, but also to persecute them in the most vehement manner. For this inhuman order they endeavored to find the most plausible pretexts; and therefore they gave out that they were enemies to the Roman emperor, since they acknowledged the authority of a certain person whose name was Jesus, whom Pilate had punished capitally as a malefactor, by a most righteous sentence, and on whom, nevertheless, they conferred the royal dignity. These perfidious insinuations had the intended effect, and the rage of the Jews against the Christiaus was conveyed from father to son, and from age to age; so that the church of Christ had at no time more bitter and desperate enemies than that very people to whom the immortal Savior was more especially sent.

The Supreme Judge of the world did not let the barbarous conduct of this perfidious nation go unpunished. The most signal marks of divine justice pursued them, and the cruelties they had exercised upon Christ, and his disciples, were dreadfully avenged. The God, who had for so many ages protected the Jews, with an outstretched arm, withdrew his aid. He permitted Jerusalem, with its famous temple, to be destroyed by Vespasian and his son Titus, an innumerable multitude of this devoted people to perish by the sword, and the greatest part of those that remained to groan under the yoke of a severe bondage. Nothing can be more affecting than the account of this terrible event and the circum-

stantial description of the tremendous calamities which attended it, as they are given by Josephus, himself a Jew and also a spectator of this horrid scene. From this period the Jews experienced in every place the hatred and contempt of the Gentile nations, still more than they had formerly done. And in these calamities the predictions of Christ were amply fulfilled, and his divine mission further illustrated.

However virulent the Jews were against the Christians, yet, upon many occasions they wanted power to execute their cruel purposes. This was not the case with the heathen nations; and consequently from them the Christians suffered the severest calamities. The Romans are said to have persecuted the Christians with the utmost violence in ten persecutions, but this number is not verified by the ancient history of the church. For if, by these persecutions, such only are meant as were singularly severe and universal throughout the empire, then it is certain that these amount not to the number mentioned; and if we take the provincial and less remarkable persecutions into the account, they far exceed it. In the fifth century certain Christians were led by some passages of the holy scriptures, and by one especially in the Revelations, to imagine that the church was to suffer ten calamities of a most grievous nature. To this notion, therefore, they endeavored, though not all in the same way, to accommodate the language of history, even against the testimony of those ancient records, from whence alone history can speak with authority.

Nero was the first emperor that enacted laws against the Christians. In this he was followed by Domitian, Marcus Antoninus the philosopher, Severus, and the other emperors who indulged the prejudices they had imbibed against the disciples of Jesus. All the edicts of these different princes were not, however equally unjust, nor made with the same views and for the same reasons. Were they now extant, as they were collected by the celebrated lawyer Domitius, in his book concerning the *duty of a proconsul*, they would undoubtedly cast a great light upon the history of the church, under the persecuting emperors. At present we must, in many cases, be satisfied with probable conjectures for want of more certain evidence.

Before we proceed further in this part of our history, a very natural curiosity leads us to inquire how it happened that the Romans, who were troublesome to no nation, on

account of their religion, and who suffered even the Jews to live under their own laws, and follow their own method of worship, treated the christians alone with such severity. This important question seems still more difficult to be solved when we consider that the excellent nature of the christian religion, and its admirable tendency to promote both the public welfare of the State and the private felicity of the individual, entitled it, in a singular manner, to the favor and protection of the reigning powers. One of the principal reasons of the severity with which the Romans persecuted the Christians, notwithstanding these considerations, seems to have been the abhorrence and contempt with which the latter regarded the religion of the empire, which was so intimately connected with the form, and indeed with the essence of its political constitution. For, though the Romans gave an unlimited toleration to all religions which had nothing in their tenets dangerous to the commonwealth, yet they would not permit that of their ancestors, which was established by the laws of the State, to be turned into derision, nor the people to be drawn away from their attachment to it. These, however, were the two things which the Christians were charged with, and that justly though to their honor. They dared to ridicule the absurdities of the pagan superstition, and they were ardent and assiduous in gaining proseleytes to the truth. Nor did they only attack the religion of Rome, but also all the different shapes and forms under which superstition appeared in the various countries where they exercised their ministry. From hence the Romans concluded that the christian sect was not only unsupportably daring and arrogant, but moreover an enemy to the public tranquillity, and every way proper to excite civil wars and commotions in the empire. It is, probably on this account that Tacitus reproaches them with the odious character of *haters of mankind*, and styles the religion of Jesus *a destructive superstition;* and that Suetonius speaks of the Christians and their doctrine in terms of the same kind.

Another circumstance that irritated the Romans against the Christians was, the simplicity of their worship, which resembled in nothing the sacred rites of any other people. The Christians had neither sacrifices, nor temples, nor images, nor oracles, nor sacerdotal orders: and this was sufficient to bring upon them the reproaches of an ignorant multitude, who imagined there could be no religion without these. Thus

they were looked upon as a sort of atheists; and by the Roman laws those who were chargeable with atheism were declared the pests of human society. But this was not all; the sordid interests of a multitude of lazy and selfish priests were immediately connected with the ruin and oppression of the christian cause. The public worship of such an immense number of deities was a source of subsistence, and even of riches to the whole rabble of priests and augurs; and also to a multitude of merchants and artists. And as the gospel threatened the ruin of this religious traffic and the profits it produced, this raised up new enemies to the Christians, and armed the rage of mercenary superstition against their lives and their cause.

To accomplish more speedily the ruin of the Christians, those, whose interests were incompatible with the spread of the gospel, loaded them with the most opprobrious calumnies, which were too easily received as truth, by the credulous and unthinking multitude, among whom they were dispersed with the utmost industry. We find a large account of these perfidious and ill grounded reproaches in the writings of the first defenders of the christian cause. And these indeed were the only arms they had to oppose the truth: since the excellence of the gospel, and the virtue of its ministers and followers, left its enemies no resources but calumny and persecution. Nothing can be imagined, in point of virulence and fury, that they did not employ for the ruin of the Christians. They even went so far as to persuade the multitude, that all the calamities, wars, tempests, and diseases that afflict mankind, were judgments sent down by the angry gods, because the Christians, who contemned their authority, were suffered in the empire.

The various kinds of punishments, both capital and corrective, which were employed against the Christians, are particularly described by learned men who have written professedly upon that subject. The forms of proceeding, used in their condemnation may be seen in the Acts of the Martyrs, in the letters of Pliny and Trajan, and other ancient monuments. These judicial forms were very different at different times, and changed according to the mildness or severity of the laws enacted by the different emperors against the Christians. Thus, at one time, we see the most diligent search made after the followers of Christ: at another all perquisition suspended, and positive accusation and information

only allowed. Under one reign we see them upon their being proved Christians, or their confessing themselves such, immediately dragged away to execution, unless they prevent their punishment by apostacy; under another we see inhuman magistrates endeavoring to compel them, by all sorts of tortures, to renounce their profession.

They who, in the perilous times of the church, fell by the hand of bloody persecution, and expired in the cause of the divine Savior, were called *martyrs*, a term borrowed from the sacred writings, which signifies *witnesses*, and thus expresses the glorious testimony which these magnanimous believers bore to the truth. The title of *confessors* was given to such as in the face of death, and at the expense of honors, fortune, and all the other advantages of the world, had confessed with fortitude, before the Roman tribunals, their firm attachment to the religion of Jesus. The veneration that was paid to both martyrs and confessors is hardly credible. The distinguishing honor and privileges they enjoyed, the authority with which their counsels and decisions were attended, would furnish ample matter for a history apart; and such an undertaking might be useful in many respects. There was, no doubt, as much wisdom as justice in treating with such respect, and investing with such privileges these christian heroes; since nothing was more adapted to encourage others to suffer with cheerfulness in the cause of Christ. But, as the best and wisest institutions are often perverted, by the weakness or corruption of men, from their original purpose, so the authority and privileges, granted in the beginning, to martyrs and confessors, became, in process of time, a support to superstition, an incentive to enthusiasm, and a source of innumerable evils and abuses.

The first three or four ages of the church were stained with the blood of martyrs, who suffered for the name of Jesus. The greatness of their number is acknowledged by all who have a competent knowledge of history, and who have examined that matter with any degree of impartiality. It is true; the learned Dodwell has endeavored to invalidate this unanimous decision of the ancient historians, and to diminish considerably the number of those that suffered death for the gospel. And after him several writers have maintained his opinion and asserted that whatever may have been the calamities that the Christians in general suffered for their attachment to the gospel, very few were put to death

on that account. This hypothesis has been warmly opposed, as derogating from that divine power that enabled Christians to be faithful even unto death, and a contrary one embraced, which augments considerably the number of these heroic sufferers. Here, no doubt, it will be wise to avoid both these extremes, and to hold the middle path, which certainly leads nearest to the truth. The martyrs were less in number than several of the ancient and modern writers have supposed them to be; but much more numerous than Dodwell and his followers are willing to believe. And this medium will be easily admitted by such as have learned from the ancient writers that in the darkest and most calamitous times of the church, all Christians were not equally nor promiscuously disturbed nor called before the public tribunals. Those who were of the lowest rank of the people escaped the best; their obscurity, in some measure, screened them from the fury of persecution. The learned and eloquent, the doctors and ministers, and chiefly the rich, after the confiscation of whose fortunes a rapacious magistry were continually gaping, these were the persons most exposed to the dangers of the times.

The actions and sayings of these holy martyrs, from the moment of their imprisonment to the last gasp, were carefully recorded, in order to be read on certain days, and thus proposed as models to future ages. But few, however, of these ancient acts are come down to our times; the greatest part of them having been destroyed during that dreadful persecution which Dioclesian carried on ten years, with such fury against the Christians. For a most diligent search was then made after all their books and papers: and all of them that were found were committed to the flames. From the eighth century downward several Latin and Greek writers endeavored to make up this loss, by compiling, with vast labor, accounts of the lives and actions of the ancient martyrs. But the most of them have given us little else than a series of fables, adorned with profusion of rhetorical flowers and striking images, as the wiser of the Romish teachers frankly acknowledge. Nor are those records that pass under the name of *martyrology*, worthy of superior credit; since they bear the most evident marks both of ignorance and falsehood. So that, upon the whole, this part of church history; for want of ancient and authentic monuments, is extremely imperfect, and necessarily attended with much obscurity.

It would have been surprising, if under such a monster of cruelty as Nero the Christians had enjoyed the sweets of tranquillity and freedom. But this was far from being the case: for this perfidious tyrant accused them of setting fire to the city of Rome, that horrid crime which he himself had committed with a barbarous pleasure. In avenging this crime upon the innocent Christians, he ordered matters so, that the punishment should bear some resemblance to the offence. He therefore wrapped up some of them in combustible garments, and ordered fire to be set to them when the darkness came on, that thus, like torches, they might dispel the obscurity of the night; while others were fastened to crosses, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, or put to death in some such dreadful manner. This horrid persecution was set on foot in the month of November, in the 64th year of Christ, and in it, according to some ancient accounts St. Paul and St. Peter suffered martyrdom; though this latter fact is contested by many, as being absolutely irreconcileable with chronology. The death of Nero, who perished miserably in the year 68, put an end to the calamities of this first persecution, under which, during the space of four years, the Christians suffered every species of torment and affliction which the ingenious cruelty of their enemies could invent.

Learned men are not entirely agreed concerning the extent of this persecution under Nero. Some confine it to the city of Rome, while others represent it as having raged throughout the whole empire. The latter opinion, which is also the most ancient, is undoutedly to be preferred; as it is certain, that the laws enacted against Christians were enacted against the whole body, and not against particular churches, and were consequently in force in the remotest provinces. The authority of Tertullian confirms this, who tells us Nero and Domitian had enacted laws against the Christians, of which Trajan had, in part taken away the force, and rendered them in some measure, without effect. We shall not have recourse, for a further confirmation of this opinion, to that famous Portuguese or Spanish inscription, in which Nero is praised for having *purged that province from the new superstition;* since that inscription is justly suspected to be a mere forgery, and the best Spanish authors consider it as such. But we may, however, make one observation, which will tend to illustrate the point in question, and that is, that since the Christians were condemned by Nero, not

so much on account of their religion, as for the falsely imputed crime of burning the city, it is scarcely to be imagined that he would leave unmolested, even beyond the bounds of Rome, a sect whose members were accused of such an abominable deed.

Though immediately after the death of Nero, the rage of this first persecution against the Christians ceased, yet the flame broke out anew in the year ninety-three or ninety-four, under Domitian, a prince little inferior to Nero, in all sorts of wickedness. This persecution was occasioned, if we may give credit to Hegesippus, by the fears that Domitian was under of losing the empire; for he was informed that among the relations of Christ a man should arise, who being possessed of a turbulent and ambitious spirit, was to excite commotions in the State, and aim at supreme dominion. However that may have been, the persecution renewed by this unworthy prince was extremely violent, though his untimely death put a stop to it not long after it commenced. Flavius Clemens, a man of consular dignity, and Flavia Domitilla, his niece, or, as some say, his wife, were the principal martyrs that suffered in this persecution, in which also the apostle John was banished to the isle of Patmos. Tertullian and other writers inform us that before his banishment he was thrown into a chaldron of boiling oil, from whence he came forth not only living, but even unhurt. This story however, is not attested in such a manner, as to leave no remaining doubt about its certainty.

PART II.

INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE STATE OF LEARNING AND PHILOSOPHY.

Philosophy in the East—that of the Persians, Chaldeans, and Arabians—wisdom of the Indians and Egyptians—the Oriental philosophy—its first principles—its adherents divide in their sentiments—their opinions concerning God—concerning the origin of the world—concerning human destiny—the Jewish philosophy—state of learning in Greece—at Rome—in other nations.

If we had any certain or satisfactory account of the doctrines which were received by the wiser of the eastern nations, when the light of the gospel first rose upon the world, this would contribute to illustrate many important points, in the ancient history of the church. But the case is quite otherwise; the fragments of the ancient oriental philosophy that are come down to us, are, as every one knows, few in number; and such as they are, they yet require the diligence, erudition, and sagacity of some learned man, to collect them into a body, to arrange them with method, and to explain them with perspicuity.

The doctrine of the *magi*, who believed the universe to be governed by *two principles*, the one good, and the other evil, flourished in Persia. Their followers, however, were not all agreed concerning the nature of these principles; but this did not prevent the propagation of the main doctrine, which was received throughout a considerable part of Asia and Africa, especially among the Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syrians, and Egyptians, though with different modifications, and had even infected the Jews themselves. The Arabians at that time, and even afterward, were more remarkable for strength and courage than for genius and sagacity; nor do they seem, according to their own confession, to have acquired any great reputation for wisdom and philosophy before the time of Mahomet.

From the earliest times the Indians were distinguished by their taste for sublime knowledge and wisdom. We might, perhaps, be able to form a judgment of their philosophical tenets, if that most ancient book, which they looked upon as particularly sacred, and which they call *veda*, or the law, were brought to light, and translated into some known language. But the accounts which are given of this remarkable book, by those who have been in the Indies, are so various and irreconcilable with each other, that we must yet wait for further satisfaction on this head. As to the Egyptians, they were divided, as every one knows, into a multitude of sects and opinions; so that their labor seems exceeding fruitless, who endeavour to reduce the philosophy of this people to one system.

But of all the different systems of philosophy that were received in Asia and Africa about the time of our Savior, none were so detrimental to the Christian religion, as that which was styled *gnosis* or science i. e. *the way to the true knowledge of the Deity*, and which we have above called the *oriental doctrine*, in order to distinguish it from the Grecian philosophy. It was from the bosom of this pretended oriental wisdom, that the chiefs of those sects, which in the three first centuries perplexed and afflicted the Christian church, originally issued forth. These supercilious teachers, endeavoring to accommodate to the tenets of their fantastic philosophy, the pure, the simple, and sublime doctrines of the Son of God, brought forth, as the result of this jarring composition, a multitude of idle dreams and fictions, and imposed upon their followers a system of opinions, which were partly ludicrous, and partly perplexed with intricate subtilties, and covered over with impenetrable obscurity. The ancient teachers, both Greek and Latin, who opposed these sects, considered them as to many branches that derived their origin from the platonic philosophy. But this was pure illusion; an apparent resemblance between certain opinions of Plato, and some of the tenets of the eastern schools, deceived these good men, who had no knowledge but of the Grecian philosophy, and were absolutely ignorant of the oriental doctrines. Whoever compares the platonic and gnostic philosophy together, will easily perceive the wide difference there is between them.

The first principles of the oriental philosophy seem perfectly consistent with the dictates of reason; for its first foun-

der must undoubtedly have argued in the following manner; "there are many evils in this world, and men seem impelled by a natural instinct to the practice of those things which reason condemns; but that eternal mind, from which all spirits derive their existence, must be inaccessible to all kinds of evil and also of a most perfect and beneficent nature; therefore the origin of those evils, with which the universe abounds, must be sought somewhere else than in the Deity. It cannot reside in him who is all perfection: and therefore it must be *without* him. Now, there is nothing *without* or *beyond* the Deity, but *matter;* therefore *matter* is the centre and source of all evil, of all vice." Having taken for granted these principles, they proceeded further, and affirmed that matter was eternal, and derived its present form, not from the will of the Supreme God, but from the creating power of some inferior intelligence, to whom the world and its inhabitants owed their existence. As a proof of this assertion they alledged that it was incredible, that the Supreme Deity perfectly good, and infinitely removed from all evil, should either create or modify matter, which is essentially malignant and corrupt, or bestow upon it, in any degree, the riches of his wisdom and liberality. They were, however, aware of the insuperable difficulties that lay against their system; for when they were called to explain, in an accurate and satisfactory manner, how this rude and corrupt matter came to be arranged into such a regular and harmonious frame as that of the universe, and, particularly, how celestial spirits were joined to bodies formed out of its malignant mass, they were sadly embarrassed, and found that the plainest dictates of reason declared their system incapable of defence. In this perplexity, they had recourse to wild fictions and romantic fables, in order to give an account of the formation of the world, and the origin of mankind.

Those who, by mere dint of fancy and invention endeavor to cast a light upon obscure points, or to solve great and intricate difficulties, are seldom agreed about the methods of proceeding; and, by a necessary consequence, separate into different sects. Such was the case of the oriental philosophers when they set themselves to explain the difficulties mentioned above. Some imagined *two eternal principles* from whence all things proceeded, the one presiding over *light*, and the other over *matter*, and by their perpetual conflict, explained the mixture of good and evil, that appears in the

universe. Others maintained, that the being, which presided over matter, was not an eternal principle, but a subordinate intelligence, one of those whom the Supreme God produced from himself. They supposed that this being was moved, by a sudden impulse, to reduce to order the rude mass of matter, which lay excluded from the mansions of the Deity, and also to create the human race. A third sort fell upon a system different from the two preceding, and formed to themselves the notion of a *triumvirate* of beings, in which the *Supreme Deity* was distinguished both from the *material, evil principle*, and from the *creator* of this sublunary world. These then, were the three leading sects of the oriental philosophy, which were subdivided into various factions, by the dispute that arose when they came to explain more fully their respective opinions, and to pursue them into all their monstrous consequences. These multiplied divisions were the natural, and necessary consequences of a system which had no solid foundation, and was no more, indeed, than an airy phantom, blown up by the wanton fancies of self-sufficient men. And that these divisions did really subsist, the history of the Christian sects, that embraced this philosphy abundantly testifies.

It is, however, to be observed, that, as all these sects were founded upon one common principle, their divisions did not prevent their holding, in common, certain opinions concerning the Deity, the universe, the human race, and several, other subjects. They were all, therefore, unanimous in acknowledging the existence of an eternal nature in whom dwelt the fulness of wisdom, goodness, and all other perfections, and of whom no mortal was able to form a complete idea. This great being was considered by them as a most pure and radiant *light*, diffused through the immensity of space, which they called *pleroma*, a Greek word which signifies fulness, and they taught concerning him, and his operations, the following things: "the *eternal nature*, infinitely perfect, and infinitely happy, having dwelt from everlasting, in a profound solitude, and in a blessed tranquillity, produced at length from *itself*, two minds of a different sex, which resembled their supreme parent in the most perfect manner. From the prolific union of these two beings others arose, which were also followed by succeeding generations; so that, in process of time a celestial family was formed in the *pleroma*. This divine progeny, being immutable in its

nature, and above the power of mortality, was called by the philosophers *aion*," a term which signifies, in the Greek language, an eternal nature. How many in number these *aions* were was a point much controverted among the oriental sages.

"Beyond the mansions of *light*, where dwells the *Deity* with his celestial offspring, there lies a rude and unwieldy mass of *matter*, agitated by innate, turbulent, and irregular motions. One of the celestial natures, descending from the *pleroma*, either by a fortuitous impulse, or in consequence of a divine commission, reduced to order this unseemly mass, adorned it with a rich variety of gifts, created men and inferior animals, to store it with inhabitants, and corrected its malignity by mixing with it a certain portion of light, and also of a matter celestial and divine. This creator of the world is distinguished from the Supreme Being by the name of *demiurge*. His character is a compound of shining qualities and insupportable arrogance; and his excessive lust of empire effaces his talents and his virtues. He claims dominion over the new world he has formed, as his sovereign right: and, excluding totally the Supreme Being from all concernment in it, he demands from mankind, for himself and his associates, divine honors.

"Man is a compound of a terrestrial and corrupt body, and a soul which is of celestial origin, and, in some measure, an emanation from the divinity. This nobler part is miserably weighed down and encumbered by the body, which is the seat of all irregular lusts and impure desires. It is this body that seduces the soul from the pursuit of truth, and not only turns it from the contemplation and worship of the Supreme Being, so as to confine its homage and veneration to the Creator of this world, but also attaches it to terrestrial objects and to the pursuit of sensual pleasures, by which its nature is totally polluted. The sovereign mind employs various means to deliver his offspring from this deplorable servitude, especially the ministry of divine messengers, whom he sends to enlighten, to admonish, and to reform the human race. In the mean time, the imperious *demiurge* exerts his power in opposition to the purpose of the Supreme Being, resists the influence of those solemn invitations by which he exhorts mankind to return to him, and labors to efface the knowledge of God in the minds of intelligent beings. In this conflict, such souls, as throwing off the yoke of the

creators and rulers of this world, rise to their Supreme Parent, and subdue the turbulent and sinful motions, which corrupt *matter* excites within them, shall, at the dissolution of their mortal bodies, ascend directly to the *pleroma*. Those, on the contrary, who remain in the bondage of servile superstition and corrupt matter, shall, at the end of this life, pass into new bodies, until they awake from their sinful lethargy. In the end, however, the Supreme God shall come forth victorious, triumph over all opposition, and, having delivered from their servitude the greatest part of those souls that are imprisoned in mortal bodies, shall dissolve the frame of this visible world, and involve it in a general ruin. After this solemn period, primitive tranquillity shall be restored in the universe, and God shall reign with happy spirits, in undisturbed felicity, through the everlasting ages."

Such were the principal tenets of the oriental philosophy. The state of letters and philosophy among the Jews comes next under consideration; and of this we may form some idea from what has been already said concerning that nation. It is chiefly to be observed that the dark and hidden science, which they called the *kabbala*, was at this time taught and inculcated by many among that superstitious people. This science, in many things, bears a strong resemblance to the oriental philosophy; or, to speak more accurately, it is indeed that same philosophy, accommodated to the Jewish religion, and tempered with a certain mixture of truth. Nor were the doctrines of the Grecian sages unknown to the Jews at the period now before us; since, from the time of Alexander the Great, some of them had been admitted, even into the Mosaic religion. We shall say nothing concerning the opinions which they adopted from the philosophical and theological systems of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Syrians.

The Greeks, in the opinion of most writers, were yet in possession of the first rank among the nations that cultivated letters and philosophy. In many places, and especially at Athens, there were a considerable number of men distinguished by their learning, acuteness, and eloquence; philosophers of all sects, who taught the doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicurus; rhetoricians also, and men of genius who instructed the youth in the rules of eloquence, and formed their taste for the liberal arts. So that those who had a passion for the study of oratory resorted in mul-

titudes to the Grecian schools, in order to perfect themselves in that noble science. Alexandria, in Egypt, was also much frequented, for the same purpose, as a great number of the Grecian philosophers and retoricians dwelt in that city.

The Romans, also, at this time, made a shining figure among the polished and learned nations. All the sciences flourished at Rome. The youth of a higher rank were early instructed in the Greek language and eloquence. From thence they proceeded to the study of philosophy and the laws of their country; and they finished their education by a voyage into Greece, where they not only gave the last degree of perfection to their philosophical studies, but also acquired that refined wit and elegance of taste, that served to set off their more solid attainments in the most advantageous manner. None of the philosophical sects were more in vogue among the Romans than the epicureans and the academics, which were peculiarly favored by the great, who, soothed by their doctrines into a false security, indulged their passions without remorse, and continued in their vicious pursuits without terror. During the reign of Augustus the culture of polite learning and of the fine arts, was held in great honor, and those that contributed with zeal and success to this, were eminently distinguished by that prince. But, after his death, learning languished without encouragement, and was neglected, because the succeeding emperors were more intent upon the arts of war and rapine, than those more amiable arts and inventions that are the fruits of leisure and peace.

With respect to the other nations, such as the Germans, Celts, and Bretons, it is certain that they were not destitute of learned and ingenious men. Among the Gauls the people of Marseilles had long acquired a shining reputation for their progress in the sciences, and there is no doubt, but that the neighboring countries received the benefit of their instructions. Among the Celts, their druids, priests, philosophers, and legislators were highly remarkable for their wisdom; but their writings at least such as are yet extant, are not sufficient to inform us of the nature of their philosophy. The Romans indeed introduced letters and philosophy into all the provinces which submitted to their victorious arms, in order to soften the rough manners of the savage nations, and form in them, imperceptibly, the sentiments and feelings of humanity.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE TEACHERS AND MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH, AND ITS FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

The necessity of public teachers—extraordinary teachers—authority of the apostles—the seventy disciples—external form of the church—church at Jerusalem—rights of the people—their oblations—equality among the first christians—rulers of the church—elders or bishops—the prophets—deacons of the church at Jesusalem—bishops—nature of the episcopal dignity in this century—chorepiscopi, or country bishops—councils and metropolitans—the principal writers—the time the sacred canon was fixed, or the books of the New Testament collected into one volume—spurious writings—Clemens bishop of Rome—Ignatius, bishop of Antioch—Polycarp—Barnabas—character of the apostolic fathers.

The great end of Christ's mission was to form a universal church, gathered out of all the nations of the world, and to extend the limits of this great society, from age to age. But in order to this it was necessary, first, to appoint *extraordinary teachers*, who, converting the Jews and Gentiles to the truth, should erect everywhere christian assemblies, and then to establish *ordinary ministers*, and interpreters of the divine will, who should enforce and repeat the doctrines delivered by the former, and maintain the people in their holy profession, and in the practise of the christian virtues. For the best system of religion must necessarily either dwindle to nothing, or be egregiously corrupted, if it is not perpetually inculcated and explained by a regular and standing ministry.

The *extraordinary* teachers, whom Christ employed to lay the foundations of his everlasting kingdom, were the twelve apostles and the seventy disciples, of whom mention has been made above. To these the evangelists are to be added, by which title those were distinguished whom the apostles sent to instruct the nations, or who, of their own accord, abandoned every wordly attachment, and consecrated themselves to the sacred office of propagating the gospel. In this rank, also, we must place those to whom, in the infancy of the church, the marvelous power of speaking in foreign languages, which they had never learned, was communicated from above. For, the person to whom the divine omnipotence and liberality had imparted the gift of tongues might

conclude, with the atmost assurance, from the gift itself, which a wise being would not bestow in vain, that he was appointed by God to minister unto the truth, and to employ his talents in the service of christianity.

Many have undertaken to write the history of the apostles, a history which we find loaded with fables, doubts, and difficulty, when we pursue it further than the books of the New Testament, and the most ancient writers in the christian church. In order to have a just idea of the nature, privileges, and authority of the apostolic function, we must consider an apostle as a person who was honored with a divine commission, invested with the power of *making laws*, of *controlling and restraining the wicked*, when that was expedient, and of *working miracles*, when necessary; and sent to mankind, *to unfold to them the divine will, to open to them the paths of salvation and immortality, and to separate from the multitude, and unite, in the bonds of one sacred society, those who were attentive and obedient to the voice of God addressed to men by their ministry.*

The accounts we have of the seventy disciples are still more obscure than those of the apostles; since the former are only once mentioned in the New Testament, Luke 10: 1. The illustrations that we have yet remaining, relative to their character and office, are certainly composed by the more modern Greeks, and therefore can have but little authority or credit. Their commission extended no further than the Jewish nation, as appears from the express words of St. Luke; though it is highly probable that, after Christ's ascension, they performed the office of evangelists, and declared the glad tidings of salvation, and the means of obtaining it, through different nations and provinces.

Neither Christ nor his holy apostles, have commanded any thing clearly or expressly, concerning the external form of the church, and the precise method, according to which it should be governed. From this we may infer, that the regulation of this was, in some measure, to be accommodated to the time and left to the wisdom and prudence of the chief rulers, both of the state and of the church. If, however, it is true, that the apostles acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master, and this no Christian can call in question, then it follows, that that form of government which the primitive churches borrowed from that of Jerusalem, the first christian assembly

established by the apostles themselves, must be esteemed as of divine institution. But from this it would be wrong to conclude that such a form is immutable, and ought to be invariably observed; for this a great variety of events may render impossible. In those early times every christian church consisted of the *people*, their *leaders*, and the *ministers* or *deacons*, and these, indeed, belong essentially to every religious society. The people were undoubtedly the first in authority; for the apostles showed, by their own example, that nothing was to be carried on or determined without the consent of the assembly, and such a method of proceeding was both prudent and necessary in those critical times.

It was, therefore, the assembly of the people which chose their own rulers and teachers; or received them, by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others. The same people rejected, or confirmed by their suffrages, the laws that were proposed by their rulers, to the assembly; excommunicated profligate and unworthy members of the church, restored the penitent to their forfeited privileges, passed judgment upon the different subjects of controversy and dissension that arose in their community, examined and decided the disputes which happened between the elders and deacons; and, in a word, exercised all that authority which belongs to such as are invested with the sovereign power.

The people had, indeed purchased these privileges, by administering to the support of their rulers, ministers, and poor, and by offering large and generous contributions, when the safety or interests of the community rendered them necessary. In these supplies *each one bore a part proportioned to his circumstances;* and the various gifts which were thus brought into the public assemblies, were called *oblations*.

There reigned among the christian church, however distinguished they were by wordly rank and titles, not only an amiable harmony, but also a perfect equality. This appeared by the *feasts of charity*, in which all were indiscriminately assembled, by the names of *brethren* and *sisters*, with which they mutually saluted each other, and by several circumstances of a like nature. Nor in this first century was the distinction made between Christians of a more or less perfect order, which took place afterward. Whoever *acknowledged Christ as the Savior of mankind, and made a solemn profession of his confidence in him, was immediately baptized and received into the church.* But, in process of time, when the

church began to flourish, and its members to increase, it was thought prudent and necessary to divide the Christians into two orders, distinguished by the names of *believers* and *catechumens*. The former were those who had been solemnly admitted into the church by baptism, and in consequence thereof were instructed in all the mysteries of religion, had access to all the parts of divine worship, and were authorized to vote in the ecclesiastical assemblies. *The latter were such as had not yet been dedicated to God and Christ by baptism, and were therefore neither admitted to public prayers, nor to the holy communion, nor to the ecclesiastical assemblies.*

The rulers of the church were called either *presbyters* or *bishops*, which two titles are, in the New Testament, undoubtedly applied to the same order. These were persons of eminent gravity, and such as had distinguished themselves by their superior sanctity and merit. Their particular functions were not always the same: for, while some of them confined their labors to the instruction of the people, others contributed, in different ways, to the edification of the church. Hence the distinction between *teaching* and *ruling presbyters* has been adopted by certain learned men. But if ever this distinction existed, which I neither affirm nor deny, it certainly did not continue long, since it is manifest that St. Paul requires that all bishops or presbyters be qualified and ready to teach and instruct.

Among the first professors of Christianity there were but few men of learning; few who had capacity enough to insinuate into the minds of a gross and ignorant multitude, the knowledge of divine things. God, therefore, in his infinite wisdom, judged it necessary to raise up, in many churches, extraordinary teachers, who were to discourse, in the public assemblies, upon the various points of the christian doctrine, and to treat with the people, in the name of God, as guided by his direction, and clothed with his authority. Such were the *prophets of the New Testament*, an order of men whose commission is too much limited by the writers who confine it to the interpretation of the books of the Old Testament, and especially the prophecies. For it is certain, that they who claimed the rank of prophets, were invested with the power of censuring publicly such as had been guilty of any irregularity. But to prevent the abuses that designing men might make of this institution, by pretending to this extraordinary character, in order to execute unworthy

ends, there were always present, in the public auditories, judges, divinely appointed, who, by certain and infallible marks, were able to distinguish the false prophets from the true. This order of prophets ceased, when the want of teachers, which gave rise to it, was abundantly supplied.

The church was, undoubtedy, provided from the beginning with inferior ministers or *deacons*. No society can be without its servants, and still less such societies as those of the first Christians were. And it appears not only probable, but evident, that the *young men*, who carried away the dead bodies of Ananias and Sapphira, were the subordinate ministers, or deacons, of the church of Jerusalem, who attended the apostles to execute their orders. The first *deacons* of the church, being chosen from among the Jews who were born in Palestine, were suspected by the foreign Jews of partiality in distributing the offerings, which were presented for the support of the poor. To remedy, therefore, this disorder, several other deacons were chosen, by order of the apostles, and employed in the service of that part of the church at Jerusalem, which was composed of the foreign Jews, converted to christianity. Of these new ministers six were foreigners; as appears by their names; the seventh was chosen out of the proseleytes, of whom there were a certain number among the first Christians at Jerusalem, and to whom it was reasonable that some regard should be shown, in the election of the deacons, as well as to the foreign Jews. All the other christian churches followed the example of that at Jerusalem, in whatever related to the choice and office of the deacons. Some, particularly the eastern churches, elected *deaconesses*, and chose, for that purpose, matrons or widows of eminent sanctity, who also administered to the necessities of the poor, and performed several other offices, that tended to the maintenance of order and decency in the church.

Such was the constitution of the christian church in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither numerous nor splendid. Three or four presbyters, men of remarkable piety and wisdom, ruled these small congregations in perfect harmony, nor did they stand in need of any president or superior, to maintain concord and order, where no dissensions were known. But the number of the presbyters and deacons increasing with that of the churches, and the sacred work of the ministry growing more painful and weighty, by a number of additional duties, these new circumstances required

new regulations. It was then judged necessary, that one man of distinguished gravity and wisdom should preside in the council of presbyters, in order to distribute among his colleagues their several tasks, and to be a centre of union to the whole society. This person was at first styled the *angel* of the church to which he belonged, but was afterward distinguished by the name of *bishop*, or inspector; a name borrowed from the Greek language, and expressing the principal part of the episcopal function, which was to inspect into and superintend the affairs of the church. It is highly probable, that the church of Jerusalem, grown considerably numerous, and deprived of the ministry of the apostles, who were gone to instruct the other nations, was the first which chose a president or bishop. And it is no less probable that the other churches followed by degrees such a respectable example.

Let none, however, confound the bishops of this primitive church with those of whom we read in the following ages. For, though they were both distinguished by the same name, yet they differed extremely, and that in many respects. A bishop, during the first and second century, was a person who had the care of one christian assembly, which, at that time, was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted not so much with the authority of a *master*, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful *servant*. He instructed the people, performed the several parts of divine worship, attended the sick, and inspected into the circumstances and supplies of the poor. He charged, indeed, the presbyters with the performance of those duties and services, which the multiplicity of his engagements rendered it impossible for him to fulfil; but had not the power to decide or enact any thing, without the consent of the presbyters and people. And, though the episcopal office was both laborious and singularly dangerous, yet its revenues were extremely small, since the church had no certain income, but depended upon the gifts or oblations of the multitude, which were, no doubt, inconsiderable, and were, moreover, to be divided between the bishops, presbyters, deacons, and poor.

The power and jurisdiction of the bishops were not long confined to these narrow limits, but soon extended themselves, and that by the following means. The bishops, who lived in the cities, had, either by their own ministry or that

of their presbyters, erected new churches in the neighboring towns and villages. These churches, continuing under the inspection and ministry of the bishops, by whose labors and counsels they had been induced to embrace the gospel, grew imperceptibly into church provinces, which the Greeks afterwards called *dioceses*. But as the bishop of the city could not extend his labors and inspection to all these churches in the country and in the villages, so he appointed certain suffragans or deputies to govern and instruct these new societies; and they were distinguished by the title of *chorepiscopi*, i. e. country bishops. This order held the middle rank between bishops and presbyters, being inferior to the former, and superior to the latter.

The churches, in those ancient times, were entirely independent; *none of them subject to any jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and its own laws*. For, though the churches, founded by the apostles, had this particular deference shown them, that they were consulted in difficult and doubtful cases, yet they had no judicial authority over the others, nor the least right to enact laws for them. Nothing, on the contrary, is more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among the primitive churches, from which *councils* and *metropolitans* derive their origin. It was only in the second century that the custom of holding councils commenced in Greece, from whence it soon spread through the other provinces.

The principal place among the christian teachers, and among those also who, by their writings, were instrumental in the progress of the truth, is due to the apostles, and certain of their disciples, who were set apart and inspired by God, to record the actions of Christ and his apostles. The writings of these holy men, which are comprehended in the books of the New Testament, are in the hands of all who profess themselves Christians. Those who are desirous of particular information with respect to the history of these sacred books, and the arguments which prove their divine authority, their genuineness and purity, must consult the learned authors who have written professedly upon that matter.

The opinions, or rather the conjectures, of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important

question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us, in these latter times. It is, however, sufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured, that the four gospels were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time?

What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed, by persons whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings displayed the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all; productions appeared which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume.

The writer whose fame surpassed that of all others in this century, the apostles excepted, was Clemens, bishop of Rome. The accounts which remain of his life, actions, and death are for the most part uncertain. Two Epistles to the Corinthians, written in Greek, have been attributed to him, of which the second has been looked upon as spurious, and the first as genuine, by many learned writers. But even this latter seems to have been corrupted and interpolated by some ignorant and presumptuous author, who appears to have been displeased at observing a defect of learning and genius, in the writings of so great a man as Clemens.

The learned are now unanimous in regarding the other

writings which bear the name of Clemens, viz. *the Apostolic Canons*, *the Apostolic Constitutions*, *the Recognitions of* Clemens *and* Clementina, as spurious productions ascribed by some impostor to this venerable prelate, in order to procure them a high degree of authority. The *Apostolical Canons*, which consist of eighty-five *church laws*, contain a view of the church government and discipline received among the Greek and oriental Christians in the second and third century. The eight *books of Apostolical Constitutions* are the works of some austere and melancholy author, who, having taken it into his head to reform the christian worship, which he looked upon as degenerated from its original purity, made no scruple to prefix to his rules the names of the apostles, that thus they might be more speedily and favorably received. The *Recognitions* of Clemens, which differ very little from the Clementina, are the witty and agreeable productions of an Alexandrian Jew, well versed in philosophy. They were written in the third century, with a design to answer, in a new manner, the objections of the Jews, philosophers and gnostics, against the christian religion; and the careful perusal of them will be extremely useful to such as are curious of information with respect to the state of the christian church in the primitive times.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, succeeds Clemens in the list of the *Apostolic Fathers*, among whom were placed such christian teachers as had conversed with the apostles themselves, or their disciples. This pious and venerable man, who was the disciple and familiar friend of the apostles, was, by the order of Trajan, brought to Rome, and exposed to wild beasts in the public theatre, where he suffered martyrdom with the utmost constancy. There are yet extant several epistles, attributed to him, concerning the authenticity of which there have been, however, tedious and warm disputes among the learned, which still subsist. Of these epistles, seven are said to have been written by this eminent martyr, during his journey from Antioch to Rome; and these the most of learned men acknowledged to be genuine, as they stand in the edition published in the last century from a manuscript in the Medicean library. The others are generally rejected as spurious. As to my own sentiments of this matter, though I am willing to adopt this opinion as preferable to any other, yet I cannot help looking upon the authenticity of the *Epistle to Polycarp* as extremely dubious,

on account of the difference of style; and, indeed, the whole question, relating to the epistles of St. Ignatius in general, seems to me to labor under much obscurity, and to be embarrassed with many difficulties.

The *Epistle to the Philippians* which is ascribed to Polycarp bishop of Smyrna, who, in the middle of the second century, suffered martyrdom in a venerable and advanced age, is looked upon by some as genuine; by others, as spurious; and it is no easy matter to determine this question. The *Epistle of* Barnabas was the production of some Jew, who, most probably, lived in this century, and whose mean abilities and superstitious attachment to Jewish fables show, notwithstanding the uprightness of his intentions, that he must have been a very different person from the true Barnabas, who was St. Paul's companion. The work which is entitled *The Shepherd of* Hermas, because the angel, who bears the principal part in it, is represented in the form and habit of a shepherd, was composed in the second century by Hermas, who was brother to Pius, bishop of Rome. This whimsical and visionary writer has taken the liberty to invent several dialogues or conversations between God and the angels, in order to insinuate, in a more easy and agreeable manner, the precepts which he thought useful and salutary, into the minds of his readers. But indeed the discourse, which he puts into the mouths of those celestial beings, is more insipid and senseless than what we commonly hear among the meanest of the multitude.

We may here remark in general, that those apostolic fathers, and the other writers, who in the infancy of the church, employed their pens in the cause of christianity, were neither remarkable for their learning nor their eloquence. On the contrary, they express the most pious and admirable sentiments in the plainest and most illiterate style. This, indeed, is rather a matter of honor than of reproach to the christian cause; since we see, from the conversion of a great part of mankind to the gospel by weak and illiterate men, that the progress of christianity is not to be attributed to human means, but to a divine power.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY.

Nature of the christian religion—method of interpreting the Scriptures—of teaching religion—the Apostles' creed—catechumens and believers—care of the youth among the first Christians—secret doctrines—lives of the first Christians—excommunication—controversies among Christians—terms of acceptance—Judaizing Christians.

The whole of the Christian religion is comprehended in two great points, of which the first regards what we are to believe, and the other relates to our conduct and actions; or, to express the matter more briefly, the gospel presents to us objects of *faith* and rules of *practice*. The former are expressed by the apostles by the term *mystery* or the *truth;* and the latter by that of *godliness* or *piety*. The rule and standard of both are those books which contain the Revelation, that God made of his will to persons chosen for that purpose, whether before or after the birth of Christ. And these divine books are usually called *The Old and New Testament.*

The Apostles and their disciples took all possible care, and that in the earliest times of the church, that these sacred books might be in the hands of all Christians, that they might be read and explained in the assemblies of the faithful and thus contribute, both in private and in public, to excite and nourish in the minds of Christians a fervent zeal for the truth, and a firm attachment to the ways of piety and virtue. Those who performed the office of interpreters, studied above all things plainness and perspicuity. At the same time it must be acknowledged, that, even in this century, several Christians adopted that absurd and corrupt custom, used among the Jews, of darkening the plain words of the holy Scriptures by insipid and forced allegories, and of drawing them violently from their proper and natural signification, in order to extort from them certain mysterious and hidden significations. For a proof of this, we need go no further than the *epistle of* Barnabas, which is yet extant.

The method of teaching the sacred doctrines of religion was at this time, most simple, far removed from all the subtle rules of philosophy, and all the precepts of human art. This appears abundantly, not only in the writings of the apostles, but also in all those of the second century, which

have survived the ruins of time. Neither did the apostles, or their disciples, ever think of collecting into a regular system the principal doctrines of the christian religion, or of demonstrating them in a geometrical order. The beautiful and candid simplicity of these early ages rendered such philosophical niceties unnecessary; and the great study of those who embraced the gospel was rather to express its divine influence in their dispositions and actions, than to examine its doctrines with an excessive curiosity, or to explain them by the rules of human wisdom.

There is indeed extant, a brief summary of the principal doctrines of christianity in that *form*, which bears the name of the *Apostles' Creed*, and which, from the fourth century downward, was almost generally considered as a production of the apostles. All, however, who have the least knowledge of antiquity, look upon this opinion as entirely false and destitute of all foundation. There is much more reason and judgment in the opinion of those, who think that this creed was not all composed at once, but from small beginnings was imperceptibly augmented in proportion to the growth of heresy, and according to the exigencies and circumstances of the church, from whence it was designed to banish the errors that daily arose.

In the earliest times of the church, all who professed firmly to believe that Jesus was the only Redeemer of the world, and who, in consequence of this profession, promised to live in a manner conformable to the purity of his holy religion, were immediately received among the disciples of Christ. *This was all the preparation for baptism then required;* and a more accurate instruction in the doctrines of christianity was to be administered to them after their receiving that sacrament. But when christianity had acquired more consistence, and churches rose to the true God and his eternal Son, almost in every nation, this custom was changed for the wisest and most solid reasons. Then none were *admitted to baptism*, but such as had been previously instructed in the principal points of christianity, and had also given satisfactory proofs of pious dispositions and upright intentions. Hence arose the distinction between *catechumens* who are in a state of probation, and under the instruction of persons appointed for that purpose, and *believers*, who were consecrated by baptism, and thus initiated into all the mysteries of the christian faith.

The methods of instructing the *catechumens* differed according to their various capacites. Those in whom the natural force of reason was small, were taught no more than the fundamental principles and truths, which are, as it were, the basis of Christianity. Those, on the contrary, whom their instructors judged capable of comprehending, in some measure, the whole system of divine truth, were furnished with superior degrees of knowledge; and nothing was concealed from them, which could have any tendency to render them firm in their profession, and to assist them in arriving at christian perfection. The care of instructing such was committed to persons who were distinguished by their gravity and wisdom, and also by their learning and judgment. And from hence it comes, that the ancient doctors generally divide their flock into two classes; the one comprehending such as were solidly and thoroughly instructed, the other, those who were acquainted with little more than the first principles of religion: nor do they deny that the methods of instruction applied to these two sorts of persons were extremely different.

The christians took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the Scriptures, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their holy religion; and Schools were everywhere erected for this purpose, even from the very commencement of the christian church. We must not, however, confound the *schools* designed only for children, with the *gymnasia*, or acadamies of the ancient Christians, erected in several large cities, in which persons of riper years, especially such as aspired to be public teachers, were instructed in the different branches both of human learning and of sacred erudition. We may, undoubtedly, attribute to the apostles themselves, and their injunctions to their disciples, the excellent establishments, in which the youth destined to the holy ministry received an education suitable to the solemn office they were to undertake. St. John erected a school of this kind at Ephesus, and one of the same nature was founded by Polycarp at Smyrna. But none of these were in greater repute than that which was established at Alexandria. which was commonly called the *catechetical school*, and is generally supposed to have been erected by St. Mark.

The ancient Christians are supposed by many to have had a *secret doctrine;* and if by this be meant, that they did not teach all in the same manner, or reveal all at once, and to

all indiscriminately, the sublime mysteries of religion, there is nothing in this that may not be fully justified. It would have been improper, for example, to propose to those, who were yet to be converted to christianity, the more difficult doctrines of the gospel, which surpass the comprehension of imperfect mortals. Such were, therefore, first instructed in those points which are more obvious and plain, until they became capable of more difficult attainments in religious knowledge. Nay, more; even those who were already admitted into the society of Christians, were, in point of instruction, differently dealt with according to their respective capacities. Those who consider the *secret doctrine* of this century in any other light, or give to it a greater extent than what we have here attributed to it, confound the superstitious practices of the following ages, with the simplicity of the discipline which prevailed at the time of which we write.

The lives and manners of the Christians in this century, are highly celebrated by most authors, and recommended to succeeding generations as unspotted models of piety and virtue. And if these encomiums be confined to the greatest part of those, who embraced christianity in the infancy of the church, they are certainly distributed with justice. But many run into extremes upon this head, and estimating the lives and manners of all by the illustrious examples of some eminent saints, or the sublime precepts and exhortations of certain pious teachers, fondly imagine that every appearance of vice and disorder were banished from the first christian societies. The greatest part of those authors, who have written concerning the innocence and sanctity of the primitive Christians, have fallen into this agreeable error. And a gross error indeed it is, as the strongest testimonies too evidently prove.

One of the circumstances which contributed chiefly to preserve at least an external appearance of sanctity in the christian church, was the right of excluding from thence, and from all participation of the sacred rites and ordinances of the gospel, such as had been guilty of enormous transgressions, and to whom repeated exhortations to repentance and amendment had been administered in vain. This right was vested in the church, from the earliest period of its existence, by the apostles themselves, and was exercised by each christian assembly upon its respective members. The

rulers or teachers denounced the persons whom they thought unworthy of the privileges of church communion, and the people, freely approving or rejecting their judgment, pronounced the decisive sentence. It was not, however, irrevocable; for such as gave undoubted signs of their sincere repentance, and declared their solemn resolutions of future reformation, were re-admitted into the church, however enormous their crimes had been; but in case of a relapse, their second exclusion became irreversible.

It will easily be imagined, that unity and peace could not reign long in the church, since it was composed of Jews and Gentiles, who regarded each other with the bitterest aversion. Beside, as the converts to christianity could not extirpate radically the prejudices which had been formed in their minds by education, and confirmed by time, they brought with them into the bosom of the church more or less of the errors of their former religions. Thus the seeds of discord and controversy were early sown, and could not fail to spring up soon into animosities and dissensions, which accordingly broke out and divided the church. The first of these contoversies, which was set on foot in the church of Antioch, regarded the necessity of observing the law of Moses, and its issue is mentioned by St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles. This controversy was followed by many others, either with the Jews, who were violently attached to the worship of their ancestors, or with the votaries of a wild and fanatical sort of philosophy, or with such as mistaking the true genius of the christian religion, abused it monstrously to the encouragement of their vices, and the indulgence of their appetites and passions. St. Paul and the other apostles, have, in several places of their writings, mentioned these controversies, but with such brevity, that it is difficult, at this distance of time, to come at the true state of the question in these various disputes.

The most weighty and important of all these controversies was that which certain Jewish teachers raised at Rome and in other christian churches, concerning the means of justification and acceptance with God, and the method of salvation pointed out in the word of God. The apostles, wherever they exercised their ministry, had constantly declared all hopes of acceptance and salvation delusive, except such as were founded on Jesus the Redeemer, and his all sufficient *merits*, while the Jewish teachers maintained

the *works* of the law to be the true efficient cause of the soul's eternal salvation and felicity. This latter sentiment not only led to many other errors extremely prejudicial to christianity, but was also injurious to the glory of the divine Savior. For those who looked upon a course of life conformable to the law as a meritorious title to eternal happiness, could not consider Christ as the Son of God, and the Savior of mankind, but only as an eminent prophet, or a divine messenger, sent from above, to enlighten and instruct a darkened world. It is not, therefore, surprising, that St. Paul took so much pains in his epistle to the Romans, and in his other writings, to extirpate such a pernicious and capital error.

The controversy that had been raised concerning the necessity of obeying the Mosaic law, was determined by the apostles in the wisest and most prudent manner. Their authority, however, respectable as it was, had not its full effect. For the prejudices which the Jews, especially those who lived in Palestine, entertained in favor of the Mosaic law, and their ancient worship, were so deeply rooted in their minds, that they could not be thoroughly removed. The force of these prejudices was indeed somewhat diminished after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the ruin of the temple, but not entirely destroyed. And hence, as we shall see in its place, a part of the judaizing Christians separated themselves from the rest, and formed a particular sect, distinguished by their adherence to the law of Moses.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING THE RITES AND CEREMONIES USED IN THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

Baptism and Lord's supper—apostolic rites—jewish rites retained in several places—public assemblies of Christians—public worship—Lord's supper feasts of charity—baptism—anointing the sick—fasting.

The christian religion was singularly commendable on account of its beautiful and divine simplicity, which appears from the two great and fundamental principles on which it was built, viz. *faith* and *charity*. This simplicity.

was not, however, incompatible with certain external rights and positive institutions, which, indeed, are necessary, in this imperfect state, to keep alive a sense of religion in the minds of men. The rites instituted by Christ himself were only two in number, and these designed to continue to the end of the church here below, without any variation. These rites were *baptism* and the *holy supper*, which are not to be considered as mere ceremonies, nor yet as symbolic representations only, but also as ordinances accompanied with a sanctifying influence upon the heart and the affections of true Christians. And we cannot help observing here, that since the divine Savior thought fit to appoint no more than two plain institutions in his church, this shows us that a number of ceremonies is not essential to his religion, and that he left it to the free and prudent choice of Christians to establish such rites as the circumstances of the times, or the exigencies of the church might require.

There are several circumstances which incline us to think that the friends and apostles of our blessed Lord either tolerated through necessity, or appointed for wise reasons, many other external rites in various places. At the same time we are not to imagine that they ever conferred upon any person a perpetual, indelible, pontifical authority, or that they enjoined the same rites in all churches. We learn, on the contrary, from authentic records, that the christian worship was, from the beginning, celebrated in a different manner, in different places, and that, no doubt, by the orders, or, at least, with the approbation, of the apostles and their disciples. In these early times it was both wise and necessary to show, in the establishment of outward forms of worship some indulgence to the ancient opinions, manners, and laws of the respective nations, to whom the gospel was preached.

From hence it follows that the opinion of those who maintain that the Jewish rites were adopted *everywhere* in the christian churches, by the apostles or their disciples, is destitute of all foundation. In those christian societies which were totally or principally composed of Jewish converts, it was natural to retain as much of the Jewish ritual as the genius of christianity would suffer, and a multitude of examples testify that this was actually done. But that the same translation of Jewish rites should take place in christian churches, where there were no Jews, or a very small and in-

considerable number, is utterly incredible, because it was morally impossible. In a word, the external form of worship, used in the times of old, must necessarily have been regulated and modified according to the character, genius, and manners of the different nations on which the light of the gospel shone.

Since, then, there was such a variety in the ritual and discipline of the primitive churches, it must be very difficult to give an account of the worship, manners, and institutions of the ancient Christians as will agree with what was practised in all those countries where the gospel flourished. There are, notwithstanding, certain laws, whose authority and obligation were universal and indispensable, among all Christians, and of these we shall here give a brief account.

All Christians were unanimous in setting apart the first day of the week, on which the triumphant Savior arose from the dead, for the solemn celebration of public worship. The pious custom, which was derived from the example of the church of Jerusalem, was founded upon the express appointment of the apostles, who consecrated that day to the same sacred purpose, and was observed universally throughout all the Christian churches, as appears from the united testimonies of the most credible writers. The seventh day of the week was also observed as a festival, not by the Christians in general, but by such churches only as were principally composed of Jewish converts, nor did the other Christians censure this custom as criminal and unlawful. It appears, moreover, that all the christian churches observed two great anniversary festivals: the one in memory of Christ's glorious resurrection; and the other to commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles. To these we may add the days on which the blessed martyrs laid down their lives for the truth, which days were probably dignified with particular solemnities and marks of veneration from the earliest times.

The places in which the first Christians assembled to celebrate divine worship, were, no doubt, the houses of private persons. But in process of time, it became necessary, that these sacred assemblies should be confined to one fixed place, in which the books, tables, and desks, required in divine service, might be constantly kept, and the danger avoided, which, in those perilous times, attended their transportation from one place to another. And then, probably, the places

of meeting, that had formerly belonged to private persons, became the property of the whole christian community.—These few remarks are, in my opinion, sufficient to determine that question, which has been so long and so tediously debated, viz. *whether the first Christians had churches or not?* Since if any are pleased to give the name of *church* to a house, or the part of a house, which, though appointed as the place of religious worship, was neither separated from common use, nor considered as holy in the opinion of the people, it will be readily granted that the most ancient Christians had churches.

In these assemblies the holy scriptures were publicly read, and for that purpose were divided into certain portions or lessons. This part of divine service was followed by a brief exhortation to the people in which eloquence and art gave place to the natural and fervent expression of zeal and charity. If any declared themselves extraordinarily animated by the Holy Spirit, they were permitted to explain successively the divine will, while the other prophets, who were present, decided how much weight and authority was to be attributed to what they said. The prayers, which made a considerable part of the public worship, came in at the conclusion of these discourses, and were repeated by the bishop or presbyter, who presided in the service. To these were added certain hymns, which were sung not by the whole assembly, but by persons appointed for that purpose, during the celebration of the Lord's supper, and the feasts of charity. Such were the essential parts of divine worship, which were observed in all christian churches, though perhaps the method and order in which they were performed, were not the same in all.

The prayers of the first Christians were followed by *oblations* of bread, wine, and other things; and hence both the ministers of the church, and the poor derived their subsistence. Every Christian, who was in an opulent condition, and indeed every one, according to their circumstances, brought with them their gifts, and offered them as it were unto the Lord. Of the bread and wine, presented in these offerings, such a quantity was separated from the rest, as was required in the administration of the Lord's supper; this was consecrated by certain prayers pronounced by the bishop alone, to which the people assented by saying *Amen*. The last supper was distributed by the *deacons*; and this sacred in-

stitution was followed by sober repasts, which from the excellent end they were designed to promote, were, called *agapæ*, or *feasts of charity*. Many attempts have been made to fix precisely the nature of these social feasts. But here it must be again considered, that the rites and customs of the primitive Christians were very different in different countries, and that consequently these feasts, like other institutions, were not everywhere celebrated in the same manner.—This is the true and only way of explaining all the difficulties that can arise upon this subject.

The sacrament of *baptism* was administered in this century, without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font. At first it was usual for all who labored in the propagation of the gospel, to be present at that solemn ceremony; and it was customary, that the converts should be baptized and received into the church by those under whose ministry they had embraced the Christian doctrine. But this custom was soon changed. When the Christian churches were established, and governed by a system of fixed laws, the right of baptizing christian converts was vested in the bishop alone. This right, indeed, he conferred upon the *presbyters* and *chorepiscopi*, or *country bishops*, when the bounds of the church were still further enlarged, reserving however to himself, the *confirmation* of the baptism, which was administered by a presbyter. There were, doubtless, several circumstantial rites and ceremonies observed in the administration of this sacrament, for the sake of order and decency. Of these, however, it is not easy, nor perhaps possible, to give a certain or satisfactory account; since, upon this subject, we are too much exposed to the illusion, which arises from confounding the customs of the primitive times with those of succeeding ages.

Those who were visited with violent or dangerous disorders, sent, according to the apostle's direction, for the rulers of the church, and, after confessing their sins, were recommended by them to the divine mercy in prayers full of piety and fervor, and were anointed with oil. This rite has occasioned many debates, and indeed they must be endless, since the silence of the ancient writers upon that head renders it impossible to decide the matter, with any degree of certainty. The anointing the sick is rarely mentioned in the ancient records of the church, though there is no reason to

doubt of its having been a universal custom among Christians.

Neither Christ nor his apostles enacted any law concerning *fasting*. A custom, however, prevailed among many Christians, of joining abstinence with their prayers, especially when they were engaged in affairs of extraordinary moment and importance. As this custom was authorized by no public law, the time that was to be employed in these acts of abstinence was left to every one's private judgment, nor were those looked upon as criminal, who contented themselves with observing the rules of strict temperance, without going any further. In the most ancient times we find no mention of any public and solemn fasts, except upon the anniversary of Christ's crucifixion. But in process of time, days of fasting were gradually introduced, first by custom, and afterward by positive appointment; though it is not certain what those days were, nor whether they were observed in the first century. Those, notwithstanding, who affirm that, in the time of the apostles, or soon after, the fourth and sixth days of the week were observed as fasts, are not, it must be acknowledged, destitute of specious arguments, in favor of their opinion.

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THE DIVISIONS AND THE HERESIES WHICH TROUBLED THE CHURCH DURING THIS PERIOD.

Sects formed in the apostles' time—the Gnostics sprung from the oriental philosophy—their pernicious errors concerning the scriptures—their moral doctrines—dissensions among this sect—Dositheus—Simon Magus—his history and doctrines—Menander—Nicolaitans—Cerinthians—Nazarenes—Ebionites.

The christian church was scarcely formed, when in different places there started up pretended reformers, who, not satisfied with the simplicity of that religion which was taught by the apostles, meditated changes of doctrine and worship and set up a new religion drawn from their own licentious imaginations. This we learn from the writings of the apostles, and particularly from the epistles of St. Paul, where we find that some were for forcing the doctrines of christianity into a conformity with the philosophical systems they had adopted, while others were as studious to blend with

these doctrines the opinions, customs, and traditions of the Jews. Several of these are mentioned by the apostles, such as Hymenæus, Alexander, Philetes, Hermogenes, Demas, and Diotrephes; though the four last are rather to be considered as apostates from the truth than as corrupters of it.

The influence of these new teachers was but inconsiderable at first. During the lives of the apostles, their attempts towards the perversion of christianity were attended with little success, and the number of their followers was exceeding small. They, however, acquired credit and strength by degrees, and even from the first dawn of the gospel, laid, imperceptibly, the foundations of those sects, whose animosities and disputes produced afterward such trouble and perplexity in the christian church. The true state of these divisions is more involved in darkness than any other part of ecclesiastical history; and this obscurity proceeds partly from the want of ancient records, partly from the abstruse and unintelligible nature of the doctrines that distinguished these various sects, and finally, from the ignorance and prejudices of those who have transmitted to us the accounts of them which are yet extant. Of one thing, indeed, we are certain; and that is, that the most of these doctrines are chimerical and extravagant in the highest degree; and so far from containing anything that could recommend them to a lover of truth, that they rather deserve to occupy a place in the history of human delusion and folly.

Among the various sects that troubled the tranquillity of the christian church, the leading one was that of the gnostics. These enthusiastic and self-sufficient philosophers boasted of their being able to restore mankind to the *knowledge*, *gnosis*, of the true and Supreme Being, which had been lost in the world. They also foretold the approaching defeat of the *evil principle*, to whom they attributed the creation of this globe, and declared, in the most pompous terms, the destruction of his associates and the ruin of his empire. An opinion has prevailed, derived from the authority of Clemens, the Alexandrian, that the first rise of the gnostic sect is to be dated after the death of the apostles, and placed under the reign of the emperor Adrian; and it is also alleged that, before this time the church enjoyed a perfect tranquillity, undisturbed by sects of any kind. But the smallest degree of attention to the language of the holy scriptures, not to mention the authority of other ancient records, will

prevent our adopting this groundless notion. For, from several passages of the sacred writings, it evidently appears, that, even in the first century, the general meeting of Christians was deserted, and separate assemblies formed in several places by persons infected with the gnostic heresy; though at the same time it must be acknowledged, that this pernicious sect was not conspicuous, either for its number or its reputation, before the time of Adrian. It is proper just to observe here, that under the general appellation of gnostics are comprehended all those who, in the first ages of christianity, corrupted the doctrine of the gospel by a profane mixture of the tenets of the oriental philosophy, concerning the origin of evil and the creation of the world, with its divine truths.

It was from this oriental philosophy, of which the leading principles have been already mentioned, that the christian gnostics derived their origin. If it was one of the chief tenets of this philosophy that rational souls were imprisoned in corrupt matter, contrary to the will of the Supreme Deity, there were, however, in this same system, other doctrines, which promised a deliverance from this deplorable state of servitude and darkness. The oriental sages expected the arrival of an extraordinary messenger of the Most High upon earth; a messenger invested with a divine authority, endowed with the most eminent sanctity and wisdom, and peculiarly appointed, to enlighten, with the knowledge of the Supreme Being, the darkened minds of miserable mortals, and to deliver them from the chains of the tyrants and usurpers of this world. When, therefore, some of these philosophers perceived that Christ and his apostles wrought miracles of the most amazing kind, and also of the most salutary nature to mankind, they were easily induced to believe that he was the great messenger expected from above, to deliver men from the power of the malignant *genii*, or spirits, to which, according to their doctrine, the world was subjected, and to free their souls from the dominion of corrupt matter. This supposition once admitted, they interpreted, or rather corrupted, all the precepts and doctrines of Christ and his apostles, in such a manner, as to reconcile them with their own pernicious tenets.

From the false principle abovementioned arose, as it was but natural to expect, a multitude of sentiments and notions most remote from the tenor of the gospel doctrines, and the

nature of its precepts. The gnostic doctrine, concerning the creation of the world, by one or more inferior beings of an evil, or at least of an imperfect nature, led that sect to deny the divine authority of the books of the Old Testament, whose accounts of the origin of things so palpably contradicted this idle fiction. Through a frantic aversion to these sacred books, they lavished their encomiums upon the *serpent*, the first author of sin, and held in veneration some of the most impious and profligate persons, of whom mention is made in sacred history. The pernicious influence of their fundamental principle carried them to all sorts of extravagance, filled them with an abhorrence of Moses and the religion he taught, and made them assert that, in imposing such a system of disagreeable and severe laws upon the Jews, he was only actuated by the malignant author of this world, who consulted his own glory and authority, and not the real advantage of men. Their persuasion that *evil* resided in *matter*, as its centre and source, prevented their treating the body with that regard that is due to it, rendered them unfavorable to wedlock, as the means by which corporeal beings are multiplied, and led them to reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and its future reunion with the immortal spirit. Their notion, that malevolent *genii* presided in nature, and that, from them proceeded all diseases and calamities, wars, and desolations, induced them to apply themselves to the study of magic, to weaken the powers, or suspend the influences of these malicious agents. I omit the mention of several other extravagances in their system, the enumeration of which would be incompatible with the character of a compendious history.

The notions of this sect, concerning Jesus Christ, were impious and extravagant. For though they considered him as the Son of the Supreme God, sent from the *pleroma*, or habitation of the Everlasting Father, for the happiness of miserable mortals, yet they entertained unworthy ideas both of his person and offices. They denied his deity, looking upon him as the Son of God, and consequently inferior to the Father; and they rejected his humanity, upon the supposition that everything concrete and corporeal is in itself essentially and intrinsically evil. From hence the greatest part of the gnostics denied that Christ was clothed with a *real* body, or that he suffered *really*, for the sake of mankind, the pains and sorrows which he is said to have sustained, in the sacred his-

tory. They maintained that he came to mortals with no other view, than to deprive the tyrants of this world of their influence upon virtuous and heaven-born souls, and destroying the empire of these wicked spirits, to teach mankind how they might separate the divine mind from the impure body, and render the former worthy of being united to the Father of Spirits.

Their doctrine relating to morals and practice was of two kinds, and those extremely different from each other.—The greatest part of this sect adopted rules of life that were full of austerity, recommended a strict and rigorous abstinence, and prescribed the most severe bodily mortifications, from a notion that they had a happy influence in purifying and enlarging the mind and in disposing it for the contemplation of celestial things. As they looked upon it to be the unhappiness of the soul to have been associated, at all, to a malignant, terrestrial body: so they imagined, that the more that body was extenuated, the less it would corrupt and degrade the mind, or divert it from pursuits of a spiritual and divine nature; all the gnostics; however, were not so severe in their moral discipline. Some maintained that there was no moral difference in human actions; and thus, confounding right with wrong, they gave a loose rein to all the passions, and asserted the innocence of following blindly all their motions, and of living by their tumultuous dictates. There is nothing surprising or unaccountable in this difference between the gnostic moralists. For, when we examine the matter with attention, we shall find that the same doctrine may very naturally have given rise to these opposite sentiments. As they all in general considered the body as the centre and source of evil, those of that sect, who were of a morose and austere disposition, would be hence naturally led to mortify and combat the body as the enemy of the soul; and those who were of a voluptuous turn, might also consider the actions of the body, as having no relation, either of congruity, or incongruity, to the state of a soul in communion with God.

Such extraordinary doctrines had certainly need of an undoubted authority to support them; and as this authority was not to be found in the writings of the evangelists or apostles, recourse was had to fables and stratagems. When the gnostics were challenged to produce the sources from whence they had drawn such strange tenets, and an autho-

rity proper to justify the confidence with which they taught them, some referred to fictitious writings of Abraham, Zoroaster, Christ and his apostles; others boasted of their having drawn these opinions from certain secret doctrines of Christ, which were not exposed to vulgar eyes; others affirmed, that they had arrived at these sublime degrees of wisdom by an innate force and vigor of mind; and others asserted, that they were instructed in these mysterious parts of theological science by Theudas, a disciple of St. Paul, and by Matthias, one of the friends of our Lord. As to those among the gnostics, who did not utterly reject the books of the New Testament, it is proper to observe, that they not only interpreted these books most absurdly, by neglecting the true spirit of the words and the intention of the writers, but also corrupted them, in the most perfidious manner, by curtailing and adding, in order to remove what was unfavorable, or to produce something conformable to their pernicious and extravagant system.

It has been already observed, that the gnostics were divided in their opinions before they embraced christianity.—This appears from the account which has been given above of the oriental philosophy; and from hence we may see the reason, why they were formed into so many different sects after their receiving the christian faith. For, as every one endeavored to enforce the doctrines of the gospel into a conformity with their particular sentiments and tenets, so christianity must have appeared in different forms, among the different members of a sect, which passed, however, under one general name. Another circumstance which also contributed to the diversity of sects among this people was, that some being Jews by birth, as Cerinthus and others, could not so easily assume that contempt of Moses, and that aversion to his history, which were so virulently indulged by those who had no attachment to the Jewish nation, nor to its religious institutions. We observe, in the last place, that the whole religious philosophical system of the gnostics was destitute of any sure or solid foundation, and depended, both for its existence and support upon the airy suggestions of genius and fancy. This consideration alone is a sufficient key to explain the divisions that reigned in this sect; since *uniformity* can never subsist, with assurance, but upon the basis of evident and substantial truth; and *variety* must naturally introduce itself into those systems and institutions

which are formed and conducted by the sole powers of invention and fancy.

As then the Christian religion was in its first rise, corrupted in several places by the mixture of an impious and chimerical philosophy, with its pure and sublime doctrines, it will be proper to mention here the heads of those sects, who, in the first century cast a cloud upon the lustre of the rising church. Among these many gave the first place to Dositheus, a Samaritan. It is certain, that about the time of our Savior, a man, so named, lived among the Samaritans, and abandoned that sect; but all the accounts we have of him tend to show, that he is improperly placed among those called *heretics* and should rather be ranked among the enemies of christianity. For this delirious man set himself up for the Messiah, whom God, had promised to the Jews, and disowning, of consequence, the divine mission of Christ, could not be said to corrupt his doctrine.

The same observation holds true with respect to Simon Magus. This impious man is not to be ranked among those who corrupted with their errors the purity and simplicity of the christian doctrine: nor is he to be considered as the parent and chief of the heretical tribe, in which point of light he has been injudiciously viewed by almost all ancient and modern writers. He is rather to be placed in the number of those who were enemies to the progress and advancement of christianity. For it is manifest from all the records we have concerning him, that, after his defection from the Christians, he retained not the least attachment to Christ, but opposed himself openly to the divine Savior, and assumed to himself blasphemously the title of the *supreme power of God*.

The accounts, which ancient writers give us of Simon the magician, and of his opinions, seem so different, and indeed so inconsistent with each other, that certain learned men have considered them as regarding two different persons, bearing the name of Simon; the one a magician, and an apostate from christianity; the other a gnostic philosopher. This opinion, which supposes a fact, without any other proof than a seeming difference in the narration of the ancient historians, ought not to be lightly adopted. To depart from the authority of ancient writers in this matter is by no means prudent; nor is it necessary to reconcile the different accounts already mentioned, whose inconsistency is not real,

but apparent only. Simon was, by birth a Samaritan, or a Jew; when he had studied philosophy at Alexandria, he made a public profession of magic, which was nothing very uncommon at that time, and persuaded the Samaritans, by fictitious miracles, that he had received from God the power of commanding and restraining those evil beings by which mankind were tormented. Having seen the miracles which Philip wrought, by a divine power, he joined himself to this apostle, and embraced the doctrine of Christ, but with no other design than to receive the power of working miracles, in order to promote a low interest, and to preserve and increase his impious authority over the minds of men. Then St. Peter pointed out to him solemnly the impiety of his intentions, and the vanity of his hopes, in that severe discourse in the 8th chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles;* and then the vile impostor not only returned to his former ways by an entire defection from the Christians, but also opposed, wherever he came, the progress of the gospel, and even travelled into different countries with that odious design. Many things are recorded of this impostor, of his tragical end, and of the statue erected to him at Rome, which the greatest part of the learned reject as fabulous. They are at least uncertain, and destitute of all probability.

It is beyond all doubt, that Simon was in the class of those philosophers, who not only maintained the eternity of *matter*, but also the existence of an *evil being*, who presided and thus shared the empire of the universe, with the supreme and beneficent *Mind*. And as there was a good deal of variety in the sentiments of the different members of this sect, it is more than probable that Simon embraced the opinion of those who held that matter moved from eternity by an intrinsic and necessary activity, had, by its innate force produced at a certain period of time from its own substance, the *evil principle* which now exercises dominion over it, with all his numerous train of attendants. From this pernicious doctrine, the other errors attributed to him concerning *fate*, *the indifference of human actions*, *the impurity of the human body*, *the power of magic*, and such like extravagances, flow naturily as from their true and genuine source. But this odious magician still proceeded to more shocking degrees of enormity in his monstrous fictions; for he pretended, that in his person resided the greatest and most powerful of the divine *aions;* that another *aion* of the female sex, the mother of all

human souls, dwelt in the person of his mistress Helena, and that he came by the command of God, upon earth, to abolish the empire of those that had formed this material world, and to deliver Helena from their power and dominion.

Another wrong headed teacher named Menander, a Samaritan also birth, appeared in this century. He is said to have been instructed by Simon; though this opinion has no other foundation, than the general notion that all the various sects of the gnostics derived their origin, from that magician; and this notion is entirely groundless. Be that as it will Menander should rather be ranked with the lunatics than with the heretics of antiquity, seeing he also took it into his head to exhibit himself to the world as the promised Savior. For it appears, by the testimonies of Irenæus, Justin, and Tertullian, that he pretended to be one of the *aions* sent from the *pleroma*, or celestial regions, to succor the souls that lay groaning under bodily oppression and servitude, and to maintain them against the violence and stratagems of the *demons* that hold the reins of empire in this sublunary world. As this doctrine was built upon the same foundation with that of Simon Magus, therefore the ancient writers looked upon him as the instructer of Menander.

If then we separate these three persons, now successively mentioned, from the heretics of the first century, we may rank among the chief of the christian sectaries, and particularly of those that bear the general name of gnostics, the Nicolaitans, whom Christ himself mentions with abhorrence by the mouth of his apostle. It is true, indeed, that the divine Saviour does not reproach them with erroneous opinions concerning the deity, but with the licentiousness of their practice, and the contempt of that solemn law which the apostles had enacted, Acts 15: 29, against fornication, and the use of *meats* offered to idols. It is, however, certain, that the writers of the second and following centuries, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens, and others, affirm, that the Nicolaitans, adopted the sentiments of the gnostics, concerning the *two principles* of all things, the *aions* and the origin of this terrestrial globe. The authority of these writers would be entirely satisfactory in this matter, were there not some reason to imagine, that they confounded, in their narrations, two sects very different from each other; that of the Nicolaitans, mentioned in Revelations; and another founded by a

certain Nicolaus, in the second century, upon the principles of the gnostics. But this is a matter of too doubtful a nature to justify a positive decision on either side.

There is no sort of doubt, but that Cerinthus may be placed with propriety among the gnostics, though the learned are not entirely agreed whether he belongs to the heretics of the first or second century. This man was by birth a Jew, and having applied himself to letters and philosophy at Alexandria, attempted at length to form a new and singular system of doctrine and discipline by a monstrous combination of the doctrines of Christ, with the opinions and errors of the Jews and gnostics. From the latter he borrowed their *pleroma* their *aions*, their *demiurge*, &c. and so modified and tempered these fictions, as to give them an air of Judaism, which must have considerably favored the progress of his heresy. He taught "that the creator of this world, whom he considered also as the sovereign and lawgiver of the Jewish people, was a *being* endowed with the greatest virtues, and derived his birth from the *Supreme God*; that this *being* fell, by degrees, from his native virtue, and his primitive dignity; that the *Supreme God*, in consequence of this, determined to destroy his empire, and sent upon earth, for this purpose, one of the ever happy and glorious *aions*, whose name was Christ; that this Christ chose for his habitation the person of Jesus, a man of the most illustrious sanctity and justice, the son of Joseph and Mary, and descending in the form of a *dove*, entered into him while he was receiving the baptism of John in the waters of Jordan; that Jesus, after his union with Christ opposed himself with vigor to the *God of the Jews*, and was, by his instigation, seized and crucified by the Hebrew chiefs; that when Jesus was taken captive, Christ ascended up on high, so that the man Jesus alone was subjected to the pains of an ignominious death." Cerinthus required of his followers, that they should worship the father of Christ, even the Supreme God, in conjunction with the Son; they should abandon the lawgiver of the Jews, whom he looked upon as the creator of the world; that they should retain a part of the law given by Moses, but should, nevertheless, employ their principal attention and care to regulate their lives by the precepts of Christ. To encourage them to this, he promised them the resurrection of this mortal body, after which was to commence a scene of the most exquisite delights, during Christ's earthly reign of a thousand years, which was

to be succeeded by a happy and never ending life in the celestial world. For Cerinthus held that Christ will one day return upon earth, and, renewing his former union with the man Jesus, will reign with his people in the land of Palestine during a thousand years.

It has been already observed, that the church was troubled with early disputes concerning the law of Moses, and the jewish rites. Those, however, who considered the observance of the Mosaic rites as necessary to salvation, had not, in this first century, proceeded so far as to break off all communion with such as differed from them in this matter. Therefore they were still regarded as brethren, though of the weaker sort. But when, after the second destruction of Jerusalem, under the emperor Adrian, these zealots for the jewish rites deserted the ordinary assemblies of Christians, and established separate meetings among themselves, then they were numbered with those sects who had departed from the pure doctrine of Christ. Hence the name Nazarenes and Ebionites, by which the judaizing Christians were distinguished from those who looked upon the Mosaic worship and ceremonies as entirely abolished by the appearance of Christ upon earth. We shall only observe further, under this head, that though the Nazarenes and Ebionites are generally placed among the sects of the apostolic age, yet they really belong to the second century, which was the earliest period of their existence as a sect.

THE SECOND CENTURY.

PART I.

EXTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THE PROSPEROUS EVENTS THAT HAPPENED TO THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

State of the Republic—progress of christianity—conversion of the Gauls—translation of the New Testament—Christians defended and heretics refuted—miracles and extraordinary gifts—miracle of the thundering legion dubious—sedition and slaughter of the Jews—philosophers converted to christianity.

In this century the Roman sceptre was, for the most part, swayed by princes of a mild and moderate turn. Trajan, though too eagerly bent upon the pursuit of glory, and not always sufficiently attentive to his conduct, nor prudent in his measures, was nevertheless endowed with many virtues, and the predominant lines of his character were clemency and benevolence. Adrian was of a more harsh and untractable temper; yet very far from deserving the reputation of a wicked or unjust prince. He was of a mixed character, chargeable with several vices, and estimable on account of many excellent qualities. The Antonines were illustrious models of humanity, goodness, and sublime virtue. Severus himself, in whose character and disposition such an unexpected and disadvantageous change was effected, was, in the beginning of his reign, unjust toward none, and even the Christians were treated by him with equity and mildness.

This lenity of the emperors was singularly adventageous to those Christians who lived under the Roman sceptre; it suspended sometimes their sufferings, and alleviated the burden of their distresses. For though edicts of a severe nature were issued out against them, and the magistrates, animated by the priests and by the multitude, shed their blood

with a cruelty which frequently exceeded even the dictates of the most barbarous laws, yet there was always some remedy that accompanied these evils, and softened their severity. Trajan, however condemnable in other respects, on account of his conduct towards the Christians, was yet engaged, by the representations that Pliny the younger gave of them, to forbid all *search to be made after them*. He also prohibited all anonymous libels and accusations, by which the Christians had so often been perfidiously exposed to the greatest sufferings. Antoninus Pius went so far as to enact penal laws against their accusers. And others, by various acts of beneficence and compassion, defended them from the injurious treatment of the priests and people. Hence it come to pass that, in this century, the limits of the church were considerably enlarged, and the number of converts to to christianity prodigiously augmented. Of the truth of this, we have the most respectable testimonies, whose evidence and authority are every way superior to the vain attempts which some have made to obscure and weaken them.

It is not easy to point out particularly the different countries on which the light of celestial truth first rose in this age. The ancient records that yet remain, do not give us information sufficient to determine that matter with certainty, nor is it, indeed, a matter of much importance. We are however, assured by the most unexceptionable testimonies, that Christ was worshipped as God, almost throughout the whole east, as also among the Germans, Spaniards, Celts, Britons, and many other nations; but which of them received the gospel in the first century, and which in the second, is a question unanswerable at this distance of time. Pantænus, the head of the Alexandrian school, is said to have conveyed to the Indians the knowledge of Christ. But after an attentive examination of the account which Eusebius gives of this matter, it will appear, that these Indians were certain Jews, inhabitants of the Happy Arabia whom Bartholomew the apostle had before instructed in the doctrines of christianity. For, according to the account of St. Jerome, Pantænus, found among this people the gospel of St. Matthew, which they had received from Bartholomew their first teacher.

The christian religion, having penetrated among the Gauls, seems to have passed from thence into that part of Germany which was subject to the Romans, and from thence

into Britain. Certain German churches, indeed, are fondly ambitious of deriving their origin from St. Peter, and from the companions of the other apostles. The Britons also are willing to believe, upon the authority of Bede, that in this century, and under the reign of Marcus Antoninus, their king Lucius addressed himself to Eleutherus the Roman pontiff, for teachers to instruct him in the christian religion, and having obtained his request, embraced the gospel. But, after all, these traditions are extremely doubtful, and are, indeed, rejected by such as have learning sufficient to weigh the credibility of ancient narrations.

It is very possible that the light of christianity may have reached Transalpine Gaul, now called France, before the conclusion of the apostolic age, either by the ministry of the apostles themselves, or their immediate successors. But we have no records that mention with certainty the establishment of christian churches in this part of Europe before the second century. Pothinus, a man of exemplary piety and zeal, set out from Asia in company with Irenæus and others, and laboured in the christian cause with such success among the Gauls, that churches were established at Lyons at Vienne, of which Pothinus himself was the first bishop.

The writers of this century attribute this rapid progress of christianity to the power of God, to the energy of divine truth, to the extraordinary gifts, which were imparted to the first christians, and the miracles and prodigies that were wrought in their behalf, and at their command; nor do they ascribe almost any part of the amazing success that attended the preaching of the gospel, to the intervening succours of human means or second causes. But this is carrying the matter too far. The wisdom of human counsels, and the useful efforts of learning and prudence, are too inconsiderately excluded from this account of things. For it is beyond all doubt, that the pious diligence and zeal, with which many learned and worthy men recommended the sacred writings, and spread them abroad in translations, which rendered them useful to those who were ignorant of the language in which they were written, contributed much to the success and propagation of the christian doctrine. Latin versions of these sacred books were multiplied by the pious labors of the learned with particular diligence, because that language was now more universal than any other. Among these versions, that which was distinguished by the name of the Italic,

obtained universally the preference, and was followed by the Syriac, Egyptian, and Ethiopic versions, whose dates it is impossible to fix with certainty.

Among the obstacles that retarded the progress of christianity, the impious calumnies of its enemies were the most considerable. The persons, the characters, and religious sentiments of the first Christians were most unjustly treated and most perfidiously misrepresented to the credulous multitude, who were restrained by this only from embracing the gospel. Those therefore, who by their *apologetic* writings in favor of the Christians destroyed the poisonous influence of detraction, rendered, no doubt, signal service to the doctrine of Christ, by removing the chief impediment that retarded its progress. Nor were the writings of such as combated with success the ancient heretics without their use, especially in the early periods of the church. For the insipid and extravagant doctrines of these secretaries, and the gross immoralities with which they were chargeable, were extremely prejudicial to the christian religion, by disgusting many at whatever carried the christian name. But when it was known, by the writings of those who defended christianity, that these corrupt heretics were held in aversion, instead of being patronized by the true followers of Christ, then the clouds that were cast over the religion of Jesus were dispersed, and the prejudices that had been raised against it were fully removed.

It is easier to conceive than to express how much the *miraculous powers* and *extraordinary gifts*, which were displayed in the ministry of the first heralds of the gospel, contributed to enlarge the bounds of the church. These gifts, however, which were given for wise and important reasons, began gradually to diminish in proportion as the reasons ceased for which they were conferred. And, accordingly, when almost all nations were enlightened with the truth, and the number of christian churches increased daily in all places, then the miraculous gift of tongues began gradually to decrease. It appears, at the same time, from unexceptionable testimonies, that the extraordinary gifts with which the omnipotence and wisdom of the Most High had so richly endowed the rising church, were, in several places, continued during this century.

We cannot, indeed, place, with any degree of certainty, among the effects of a miraculous power, yet remaining in

the church, the story of the *christian legion*, who by their prayers drew from heaven a refreshing shower upon the army of Marcus Antoninus, ready to perish with thirst, when that emperor was at war with the Marcomanni. This remarkable event, which gave to the christians, to whom it was attributed, the name of the *thundering legion*, on account of the thunder and lightning that destroyed the enemy, while the shower revived the fainting Romans, has been mentioned by many writers. But whether it was really miraculous or not has been much disputed among learned men. Some think that the Christians, by a pious sort of mistake, attributed this unexpected and seasonable shower, which saved the Roman army, to a miraculous interposition; and this opinion is indeed supported by the weightiest reasons, as well as by the most respectable authorities.

Let us distinguish what is doubtful in this story from that which is certain. It is certain that the Roman army, enclosed by the enemy, and reduced to the most deplorable and even desperate condition, by the thirst under which they languished in a parched desert, was revived by a sudden and unexpected rain. It is also certain that both the heathens and the Christians looked upon this event as extraordinary and miraculous; the former attributing it to Jupiter, Mercury, or the power of magic; the latter to Christ, interposing thus unexpectedly, in consequence of their prayers. It is still further beyond all doubt, that a considerable number of Christians served at this time in the Roman army, and it is extremely probable that in such trying circumstances of calamity and distress, they implored the merciful interposition and succors of their God and Savior. And as the Christians of these times looked upon all extraordinary events as miracles, and ascribed to their prayers all the uncommon and singular occurrences of an advantageous nature that happened to the Roman empire, it will not appear surprising, that, upon the present occasion, they attributed the deliverance of Antoninus and his army to a miraculous interposition which they had obtained from above. But, on the other hand it must be carefully observed, that it is an invariable maxim, universally adopted by the wise and judicious, that no events are to be esteemed miraculous, which may be rationally attributed to natural causes, and accounted for by a recourse to the ordinary dispensations of Providence; and as the unexpected shower, which restored the expiring force

of the Romans, may be easily explained without rising beyond the usual and ordinary course of nature, the conclusion is manifest; nor can it be doubtful in what light we are to consider that remarkable event.

The Jews were visited with new calamities, first under Trajan, and then under Adrian, when under the standards of Barcocheba, who gave himself out for the Messiah, they rose in rebellion against the Romans. In consequence of this sedition prodigious numbers of that miserable people were put to the sword, and a new city, called Ælia Capitolina was raised on the ruins of Jerusalem, into which no Jew was permitted to enter. This defeat of the Jews tended to confirm in some measure the tranquillity of the christian church. For that turbulent and perfidious nation had hitherto oppressed and vexed the Christians, not only by presenting everywhere to the Roman magistrates complaints and accusations against them, but also by treating them in the most injurious manner in Palestine and the neighboring countries, because they refused to succor them against the Romans. But this new calamity, which fell upon that seditious nation, put it out of their power to exercise their malignity against the disciples of Jesus, as they had formerly done.

Among other accessions to the splendor and force of the growing church, we may reckon the learned and ingenious labors of those philosophers and literati, who were converted to christianity in this century. I am sensible that the advantages arising from hence to the cause of true religion, will be disputed by many; and indeed when the question is thus proposed, whether upon the whole the interests of christianity have gained or lost by the writings of the learned, and the speculations of philosophers that have been employed in its defence, I confess myself incapable of solving it in a satisfactory manner. For nothing is more manifest than this truth, that the noble simplicity and dignity of religion were sadly corrupted in many places, when the philosophers blended their opinions with its pure doctrines, and were audacious enough to submit that divine system of faith and piety to be scrutinized and modified by the fallible rule of imperfect reason.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE CALAMITOUS EVENTS WHICH HAPPENED TO THE CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY.

Persecution under Trajan—effect of Trajan's order to Pliny—persecution under Adrian—under Antoninus—under Marcus Antoninus—calamities of Christians under him—their state under Commodus and Severus—calumnies against the Christians.

In the beginning of this century there were no laws in force against the Christians, for the senate had annulled the cruel edicts of Nero, and Nerva had abrogated the sanguinary laws of his predecessor Domitian. But notwithstanding this a horrid custom prevailed of persecuting the Christians, and even of putting them to death, as often as a bloody priesthood or an outrageous populace, set on by them, demanded their destruction. Hence it happened, that even under the reign of Trajan, popular clamors were raised against the Christians, many of whom fell victims to the rage of a merciless multitude. Such were the riotous proceedings that happened in Bithynia, under the administration of Pliny the younger, who, upon that occasion wrote to the emperor, to know in what manner he was to conduct himself toward the Christians. The answer which he received from Trajan amounted to this: "that the Christians were not to be *officiously sought after*, but that such as were *accused and convicted of an adherence to Christianity* were to be put to death, as wicked citizens, if they did not return to the religion of their ancestors."

This edict of Trajan, being registered among the public and solemn laws of the Roman empire, set bounds indeed to the fury of those who persecuted the Christians, but was, however, the occasion of martyrdom to many, even under the best emperors. For, as often as an accuser appeared, and the person accused of an adherence to christianity, confessed the truth of the charge, the only alternative then was apostacy or death, since a magnanimous perseverance in the christian faith was, according to the edict of Trajan, a capital crime; and accordingly the venerable and aged Simeon, son of Cleophas, and bishop of Jerusalem, was by this very law, crucified in consequence of an accusation formed

against him by the Jews. By the same law also was the great and pious Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, ordered by Trajan himself to expire in the Roman theatre, exposed to the rapacity of furious beasts; for as the law denounced simply death to such as were convicted of an attachment to Christ, the kind of punishment was left by the legislator to the choice of the judge.

Such of the Christians as could conceal their profession, were indeed sheltered by the law of Trajan, which was therefore a disagreeable restraint upon the heathen priests, who breathed nothing but fury against the disciples of Jesus. The office of an accuser was also dangerous, and very few were disposed to undertake it, so that the sacerdotal craft was now inventing new methods to oppress the Christians. The law of Trajan was therefore artfully evaded under the the reign of his successor Adrian. The populace, set in motion by their priests, demanded of their magistrates, with one voice, during the public games, the destruction of the Christians; and the magistrates, fearing that a sedition might be the consequence of despising or opposing these popular clamors, were too much disposed to indulge them in their request. During these commotions, Serenus Gratianus, proconsul of Asia, represented to the emperor, how barbarous and unjust it was to sacrifice to the fury of a lawless multitude persons who had been convicted of no crime. Nor was his wise and equitable remonstrance without effect: for Adrian, by an edict, issued out to these magistrates, prohibited the putting the Christians to death, unless they were convicted of crimes committed against the laws; and this edict appears to have been a solemn renewal of the law of Trajan. The moderation of the emperor, in this edict, may perhaps have been owing to the admirable *apologies* of Quadratus and Aristides, in favor of the Christians, which were every way proper to dispel the angry prejudices of a mind that had any sense of equity and humanity left. But it was not from the Romans alone that the disciples of Christ were to feel oppression; Barcochebas, the fictitious king of the Jews, whom Adrian afterwards defeated, vented against them all his fury, because they refused to join his standard, and second his rebellion.

The law of Adrian, according to its natural sense, seemed to cover the Christians from the fury of their enemies, since it rendered them punishable on no other account than the

commission of crimes, and since the magistrates refused to interpret their religion as the *crime* mentioned in the imperial edict. Therefore their enemies invented a new method of attacking them, under the reign of Antoninus Pius, even by accusing them of impiety and atheism. This calumny was refuted in an *apology* for the Christians, presented to the emperor by Justin Martyr, in consequence of which this equitable prince ordered that all proceedings against them should be regulated by the law of Adrian. This, however, was not sufficient to suppress the rage of bloodthirsty persecution: for, some time after this, on occasion of some earthquakes, which happened in Asia, the people renewed their violence against the Christians, whom they considered as the authors of those calamities, and treated consequently in the most cruel and injurious manner. The emperor, informed of these unjust and barbarous proceedings, addressed an edict to the whole province of Asia, in which he denounced capital punishment against such as should, for the future, accuse the Christians, without being able to prove them guilty of any crime.

This worthy prince was succeded by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, whom most writers have celebrated beyond measure, on account of his extraordinary wisdom and virtue. It is not, however, in his conduct toward the Christians, that we must look for the reasons of these pompous encomiums; for here, the justice and clemency of the emperor suffer a strange eclipse. He did not indeed revoke the edict of Antoninus Pius, or abrogate the laws which preceding emperors had enacted in favor of the Christians; but he did what was equally pernicious to them. Without examining impartially their cause, he lent an easy and attentive ear to all the most virulent insinuations of their enemies, and more especially to the malignant calumnies of the philosophers, who accused them of the most horrid crimes and the most monstrous impiety, and charged them with renewing the shocking feast of Thyestes, and the incestuous amours of the Theban prince. So that, if we except that of Nero, there was no reign under which the Christians were more injuriously and cruelly treated, than under that of the wise and virtuous Marcus Aurelius; and yet there was no reign under which such numerous and victorious *apologies* were published in their behalf. Those which Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, and Tatian drew up on this occasion are still extant.

This emperor issued out against the Christians, whom he considered as a vain, obstinate, and vicious set of men, edicts, which, upon the whole, were very unjust, though we do not know, at this distance of time, their particular contents. In consequence of these imperial edicts the judges and magistrates received the accusations, which even slaves and the vilest of the perjured rabble brought against the followers of Jesus. And the Christians were put to the most cruel tortures, and condemned to meet death in the most barbarous forms, notwithstanding their perfect innocence, and their persevering and solemn denial of the crimes laid to their charge. The edicts were so positive and express against such of the Christians as were guilty of no crime, that the corrupt judges, who through motives of interest or popularity, desired their destruction, were obliged to suborn false accusers, to charge them with actions that might bring them within the reach of the laws. Hence many fell victims to cruel superstition, and popular fury, seconded by the corruption of a wicked magistracy and the connivance of a prince, who, with respect to one set of men, forgot the principles of justice and clemency which directed his conduct toward all others. Among these victims there were many men of illustrious piety, and some of eminent learning and abilities, such as the holy and venerable Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and Justin Martyr, so justly renowned for his erudition and philosophy. Many churches, particularly those of Lyons and Vienne, were almost entirely destroyed during this violent persecution, which raged in the year 177, and will be an indelible stain on the memory of the prince by whose order it was carried on.

During the reign of Commodus the Christians suffered very little; no general persecution raged against them, and any cruelties they endured were confined to a small number, who had newly abandoned the pagan superstitions. But the scene changed toward the latter end of this century, when Severus was declared emperor. Then Asia, Egypt, and the other provinces, were dyed with the blood of martyrs, as appears from the testimonies of Tertullian, Clemens, of Alexandria, and other writers. Those, therefore, are not to be followed, who affirmed, that the Christians suffered nothing under Severus, before the beginning of the third century, which was distinguished by the cruel edicts of this emperor against their lives and fortunes. For, as the imperial laws

against the Christians were not abrogated, and the iniquitous edicts of Trajan and Marcus Antoninus were still in force, there was a door of consequence, open to the fury and injustice of corrupt magistrates, as often as they were pleased to exercise them upon the church. It was this series of calamities under which it groaned towards the conclusion of the second century, which engaged Turtullian to write his *apology*, and several other books, in defence of the Christians.

It is very easy to account for the sufferings and calamities with which the disciples of Jesus were loaded, when we consider how they were blackened and rendered odious by the railing, the calumnies, and libels of the heathen priests, and the other defenders of a corrupt and most abominable system of superstion. The injurious charges of which we took notice above, are mentioned by all those who have written in defence of the Christians, and ought indeed to stand always upon record, as a proof both of the weakness and wickedness of their adversaries. Nothing can be more frivolous and insignificant than the objections which the most famous defenders of paganism opposed to christianity, at this time; and such as desiring a convincing proof of this assertion have only to read the arguments of Celsus on that subject. This philosopher wrote against the Christians during the reign of Adrian, and was admirably refuted by Origen, who represents him as an epicurean, a mistake which has been almost generally followed. whereas it appears, with the utmost probability, that he was a platonic philosopher, of the sect of Ammonius. Be that as it will, Celsus was a trifling caviller, as is manifest from the answer of Origen; nor do his writings against christianity serve any other purpose than to show his malignant and illiberal turn of mind

Fronto the rhetorician, and Crescens, the cynic philosopher, made also some wretched attempts against christianity. The efforts of the former are only known by the mention that is made of them by Minutius Felix and the enterprises of the latter were confined to a vehement zeal for the ruin of the Christians, and a virulent persecution of Justin Martyr, which ended in the cruel death of that eminent saint.

PART II.

INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THE STATE OF LETTERS AND PHILOSOPHY DURING THIS PERIOD.

The state of learning—Stoics—Platonics—Epicureans—the rise of the new Platonics, called Eclectics—Christians approve their discipline—Ammonius Saccas—the Ammonian or eclectic philosophy—its chief articles—its moral principles—the opinions of Ammonius of God and Christ—bad effects of this philosophy—state of learning among the Christains.

Under the reign of Trajan, letters and philosophy came forth from the retreat where they had languished during the savage tyranny, of his predecessors, and by the auspicious production of this excellent prince, were, in some measure, restored to their former lustre. This happy revolution in the republic of letters was indeed but of short duration, as it was not supported by the following emperors, who were for the most part averse to literary pursuits. Even Marcus Antoninus, who surpassed all in learning, gave protection and encouragement to the stoics alone, and, after the example of that supercilious sect, treated the arts and sciences with indifference and contempt. And here we see the true reason why the writers of this century are in general so much inferior to those of the former, in point of elegance and purity, eloquence and taste.

It must be observed, at the same time, that this degeneracy of erudition and taste did not amount to an utter extinction of the one or the other. For even in this century there were, both among the Greeks and the Romans, men, of eminent genius and abilities, who set off, in the most advantageous manner, the learning of the times, in which they lived. Among the learned Grecians, the first place is due to Plutarch a man of erudition, whose knowledge was various but indigested, and whose philosophical taste was corrupted by the sceptical tenets of the acadamies. There were like-

wise, in all the more considerable cities of the Roman empire, rhetoricians, sophists, and grammarians, who by a variety of learned exercises, seemed zealous in forming the youth to their arts of eloquence and declamation, and in rendering them fit by their talents and acquisitions to be useful to their country. But the instruction acquired in these schools was more specious than solid; and the youth who received their education in them, distinguished themselves at their entrance upon the active stage of life more by empty declamation than true eloquence; more by pompous erudidition than by wisdom and dexterity in the management of public affairs. The consequence of this was, that the rhetoricians and sophists, though agreeable to the corrupt taste of the times, which was incapable, generally speaking, of perceiving the native charms of truth, yet fell into contempt among the prudent and the wise, who held in derision the knowledge and education that were acquired in their auditories. Beside the schools now mentioned, there were two public academies in the empire; the one at Rome, founded by Adrian, in which all the sciences were taught: and the other at Berytus in Phenicia, which was principally destined for the education of the youth in the science of law.

Many philosophers, of all the different sects, flourished at this time, whose names we think it not necessary to mention. Two, however, were of such remarkable and shining merit, as rendered them real ornaments to the stoic philosophy, which the meditations of Marcus Antoninus and the manual of Epictetus abundantly testify. These two great men had more admirers than disciples and followers; for in this century the stoical sect was not in the highest esteem; as the rigor and austerity of its doctrines were by no means suited to the dissolute manners of the times. The platonic schools were more frequented, for several reasons, and particularly for these two, that their moral precepts were less rigorous and severe than those of the stoics, and their doctrines more conformable to, or rather less incompatible with, the common opinions concerning the gods. But of all the philosophers the epicureans enjoyed the greatest reputation, and had undoubtedly the greatest number of followers, because their opinions tended to encourage the indolent security of a voluptuous and effeminate life, and to banish the remorse and terrors that haunt vice, and naturally incommode the wicked in their sensual pursuits.

Toward the conclusion of this century, a new sect of philosophers arose of a sudden, spread, with amazing rapidity, throughout the greatest part of the Roman empire, swallowed up almost all the other sects, and was extremely detrimental to the cause of christianity. Alexandria, in Egypt, which had been, for a long time, the seat of learning, and, as it were, the centre of all the liberal arts and sciences, gave birth to this new philosophy. Its votaries chose to be called platonics; though far from adhering to all the tenets of Plato, they collected, from the different sects, such doctrines as they thought conformable to truth, and formed thereof one general system. The reason why they distinguished themselves by the title of platonics was, that they thought the sentiments of Plato, concerning that most noble part of philosophy which has the Deity, and things invisible, for its objects much more rational and sublime than those of the other philosophers.

What gave to this new philosophy a superior air of reason and dignity, was the unprejudiced spirit of candor and impartiality on which it seemed to be founded. This recommended it particularly to those real sages, whose inquiries were accompanied with wisdom and moderation, and who were sick of those arrogant and contentious sects, which required an invariable attachment to their particular systems. And, indeed, nothing could have a more engaging aspect than a set of men, who, abandoning all cavil, and all prejudices in favor of any party, professed searching after the truth alone, and were ready to adopt, from all the different systems and sects, such tenets as they thought agreeable to it. From hence also they were called eclectics. It is however, to be observed as we hinted in the former section, that though these philosophers were attached to no particular sect, yet they preferred, as appears from a variety of testimonies, the sublime Plato to all other sages, and approved of the most of his opinions concerning the Deity, the universe, and the human soul.

This new species of platonism was embraced by such of the Alexandrian christians as were desirous to retain, with the profession of the gospel, the title, the dignity, and the habit of philosophers. It is also said to have had the particular approbation of Athenagoras, Pantænus, Clemens the Alexandrian, and all those who, in this century, were charged with the care of the public school, which the Christians, had

at Alexandria. These sages were of opinion that *true philosophy*, the greatest and most salutary gift of God to mortals, was scattered in various portions through all the different sects; and that it was, consequently, the duty of every wise man, and more especially of every christian teacher, to gather it from the several corners, where it lay dispersed, and to employ it, thus reunited, in the defence of religion, and in destroying the dominion of impiety and vice. The christian eclectics, had this also in common with the others, that they preferred Plato to the other philosopers, and looked upon his opinions concerning God, the human soul, and things invisible, as conformable to the spirit and genius of the christian doctrine.

This philosophical system underwent some changes, when Ammonius Saccas, who taught, with the highest applause, in the Alexandrian school, about the conclusion of this century, laid the foundations of that sect which was distinguished by the name of the new Platonics. This learned man was born of christian parents, and never, perhaps, gave up entirely the outward profession of that divine religion in which he had been educated. As his genius was vast and comprehensive, so were his projects bold and singular. For he attempted a general reconciliation or coalition of all sects, whether philosophical or religious, and taught a doctrine which he looked upon as proper to unite them all, the Christians not excepted, in the most perfect harmony. And herein lies the difference between this new sect and the eclectics, who had, before this time, flourished in Egypt. The eclectics held, that in every sect there was a mixture of good and bad, of truth and falsehood, and accordingly, they chose and adopted out of each of them, such tenets as seemed to them conformable to reason and truth, and rejected such as they thought repugnant to both. Ammonius, on the contrary, maintained, that the great principles of all philosophical and religious truth were to be found equally in all sects; that they differed from each other only in their method of expressing them, and in some opinions of little or no importance; and that, by a proper interpretation of their respective sentiments, they might easily be united into one body. It is further to be observed that the propensity of Ammonius to singularity and paradox, led him to maintain that all the gentile religions, and even the christian, were to be illustrated and explained by the principles of this universal philo-

sophy; but that, in order to this, the fables of the priests were to be removed from paganism, and the comments and interpretations of the disciples of Jesus from christianity.

This arduous design, which Ammonius had formed of bringing about a coalition of all the various philosophical sects, and all the different systems of religion that prevailed in the world, required many difficult and disagreeable things in order to its execution. Every particular sect and religion must have several of its doctrines curtailed or distorted before it could enter into the general mass. The tenets of the philosophers, the superstitions of the heathen priests, the solemn doctrines of christianity, were all to suffer in this cause, and forced allegories were to be subtilely employed in removing the difficulties with which it was attended. How this vast project was effected by Ammonius, the writings of his disciples and followers, that yet remain, abundantly testify. In order to the accomplishing his purpose, he supposed that true philosophy derived its origin and its consistency from the eastern nations; that it was taught to the Egyptians by Hermes; that it was brought from them to the Greeks, by whose vain subtilties and litigious disputes it was rendered somewhat obscure and deformed; but was, however preserved in its original purity by Plato, who was the best interpreter of Hermes, and of the other oriental sages. He maintained that all the different religions that prevailed in the world, were, in their original integrity, conformable to the genius of this ancient philosophy; but that it unfortunately happened, that the symbols and fictions under which, according the eastern manner, the ancients delivered their precepts and their doctrines, were, in process of time, erroneously understood, both by priests and people, in a literal sense; that in consequence of this, the invisible beings and demons, whom the Supreme Deity had placed in the different parts of the universe, as the ministers of his providence, were, by the suggestions of superstition, converted into gods, and worshiped with a multiplicity of vain ceremonies. He therefore insisted, that all the religions of all nations should be restored to their original purity, and reduced to their primitive standard, viz. "the ancient philosophy of the east;" and he affirmed that his project was agreeable to the intentions of Jesus Christ, whose sole view, in descending upon earth, was to set bounds to the reigning superstition, to remove the errors that had crept into the religions of all na-

tions, but not to abolish the ancient theology, from whence they were derived.

Taking these principles for granted, Ammonius adopted the doctrines which were received in Egypt, the place of his birth and education, concerning the *universe* and the *Deity*, considered as constituting one great WHOLE as also concerning the *eternity of the world*, the *nature of souls*, the *empire of Providence*, and the *government of this world by demons*. For it is more evident, that the Egyptian philosophy, which was said to be derived from Hermes, was the basis of that of Ammonius; or, as it is otherwise called, of *modern platonism;* and the book of Jamblichus, concerning the *mysteries of the Egyptians*, puts the matter beyond dispute. Ammonius, therefore, associated the sentiments of the Egyptians with the doctrines of Plato, which was easily done, by adulterating some of the opinions of the latter, and forcing his expressions from their obvious and natural sense. And, to finish this conciliatory scheme, he so interpreted the doctrines of the other philosophical and religious sects, by the violent succors of art, invention, and allegory, that they seemed, at length, to bear some resemblance of the Egyptian and platonic systems.

To this monstrous coalition of heterogeneous doctrines its fanatical author added a rule of life and manners, which carried an aspect of high sanctity and uncommon austerity. He, indeed, permitted the people to live according to the laws of their country and the dictates of nature; but a more sublime rule was laid down for the wise. They were to raise above all terrestrial things, by the towering efforts of holy contemplation, those souls whose origin was celestial and divine. They were ordered to extenuate, by hunger, thirst, and other mortifications, the sluggish body, which confines the activity and restrains the liberty, of the immortal spirit; that thus, in this life, they they might enjoy communion with the Supreme Being, and ascend, after death, active and unincumbered, to the Universal Parent, to live in his presence forever. As Ammonius was born and educated among christians, he set off, and even gave an air of authority to these injunctions, by expressing them partly in terms borrowed from the sacred scriptures, of which we find a vast number of citations also in the writings of his disciples. To this austere discipline he added the pretended art of so purging and refining that faculty of the mind, which

receives the images of things, as to render it capable of perceiving the demons, and of performing many marvelous things, by their assistance. This art, which the disciples of Ammonius called *theurgy*, was not, however, communicated to all the schools of this fanatical philosopher, but only to those of the first rank.

The extravagant attempts of Ammonius did not end here. To reconcile the popular religions of different countries, and particularly the christian religion, with this new system, he fell upon the following inventions: 1st. he turned into mere allegory the whole history of the gods, and maintained that those beings whom the priests and the people dignified with this title, were no more than celestial ministers, to whom a certain kind of worship was due, but a worship inferior to that which was to be reserved for the Supreme Deity. 2dly. He acknowledged Christ to be a most excellent man, the friend of God, the admirable *theurge;* he denied, however, that Jesus designed to abolish entirely the worship of demons, and of the other ministers of divine Providence; and affirmed, on the contrary, that his only intention was to purify the ancient religion; and that his followers had manifestly corrupted the doctrine of their divine master.

This new species of philosophy, imprudently adopted by Origen and many other Christians, was extremely prejudicial to the cause of the gospel, and to the beautiful simplicity of its celestial doctrines. From hence it was, that the christian teachers began to introduce their subtle and obscure erudition into the religion of Jesus, to involve in the darkness of a vain philosophy *some of the principal truths of Christianity, that had been revealed with the utmost plainness*, and were indeed obvious to the meanest capacity; and to add to the sublime precepts of our Lord *many of their own*, which had no sort of foundation in any part of the sacred writings. From the same source arose that melancholy set of men, who have been distinguished by the name of mystics, whose system, when separated from the platonic doctrine, concerning the nature and origin of the soul, is but a lifeless mass, without any vigor, form, or consistence. Nor did the evils which sprung from this Ammonian system of philosophy end here. For, under the specious pretext of the necessity of contemplation, it gave occasion to that slothful and indolent course of life, which continues to be led by myriads of monks retired in cells, and sequestered from society,

to which they are neither useful by their instructions, nor by their examples. To this philosophy we may trace, as to their source, a multitude of vain and foolish ceremonies, proper only to cast a veil over truth, and to nourish superstition, and which are, for the most part, religiously observed by many, even in the times in which we live. It would be endless to enumerate all the pernicious consequences that may be justly attributed to this new system of philosophy, or rather to this monstrous attempt to reconcile falsehood with truth, and light with darkness. Some of its most fatal effects were, its alienating the minds of many, in the following ages, from the christian religion; and its substituting, in the place of the pure and sublime simplicity of the gospel, an unseemly mixture of platonism and christianity.

The number of learned men among the Christians, which was very small in the preceding century, increased considerably in this. Among these there were few rhetoricians, sophists, or orators. The most part were philosophers, attached to the eclectic system, though they were not all of the same sentiments concerning the utility of letters and philosophy. Those, who were themselves initiated into the depths of philosophy, were desirous that others, particularly such as aspired to the office of bishops, or teachers, should apply themselves to the study of human wisdom, in order to their being the better qualified for defending the truth with vigor, and instructing the ignorant with success. Others were of a quite different way of thinking upon this subject, and were for banishing all argumentation and philosophy from the limits of the church, from a notion that erudition might prove detrimental to the true spirit of religion. Hence the early beginnings of that unhappy contest between *faith* and *reason*, *religion* and *philosophy*, *piety* and *genius*, which increased in the succeeding ages, and is prolonged even to our times, with a violence that renders it extremely difficult to be brought to a conclusion. Those who maintained that learning and philosophy were rather advantageous than detrimental to the cause of religion, gained by degrees, the ascendant; and in consequeuce thereof laws were enacted, which excluded the ignorant and illiterate from the office of public teachers. The opposite side of the question, however, was not without defenders; and the defects and vices of learned men and philosophers contributed much to increase their number, as will appear in the progress of this history.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE TEACHERS AND MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH, AND THE FORM OF ITS GOVERNMENT.

The form of church government—association of provincial churches—origin of provincial churches—origin of councils—the authority of bishops increased by these councils—artful parallel drawn between the christian and the jewish priesthood—principal writers.

The form of church government, whose commencement we have seen in the last century, was brought, in this, to a greater degree of stability and consistence. One inspector, or *bishop*, presided over each christian assembly, to which office he was elected by the voices of the whole people. In this post he was to be watchful and provident, attentive to the wants of the church, and careful to supply them. To assist him in this laborious province, he formed a council of *presbyters*, which was not confined to any fixed number; and to each of these he distributed his task, and appointed a station, in which he was to promote the interests of the church. To the bishops and presbyters, the ministers, or *deacons*, were subject; and the latter were divided into a variety of classes, as the different exigencies of the church required.

During a great part of this century, the christian churches were independent on each other; nor were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds but those of charity. Each christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, which were either enacted, or at least approved by the society. But, in process of time, all the christian churches of a province were formed into one large church body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times, in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states, and the regular assemblies, which met, in consequence thereof, at fixed times, and were composed of the deputies of each respective state. But these church associations were not long confined to the Greeks; their great utility was no sooner perceived than they became universal, and were formed in all places where the

gospel had been planted. To these assemblies, in which the deputies or commissioners of several churches consulted together, the name of *synods* was appropriated by the Greeks and that of *councils* by the Latins; and the laws that were enacted in these general meetings were called *canons*, i. e. *rules*.

These councils, of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of this century, changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form; for by them the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished, and the power and authority of the bishops considerably augmented. The humility, indeed, and prudence of these pious prelates prevented their assuming all at once the power with which they were afterward invested. At their first appearance in these general councils they acknowledged that they were no more than the delegates of their respective churches, and that they acted in the name and by the appointment of their people. But they soon changed this humble tone, imperceptibly extended the limits of their authority, turned their influence into dominion, their counsels into laws, and openly asserted at length that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people *authoritative rules* of *faith* and *manners*. Another effect of these councils was the gradual abolition of that perfect equality which reigned among all bishops in the primitive times. For the order and decency of these assemblies required, that some one of the provincial bishops, met in council, should be invested with a superior degree of power and authority; and hence the rights of metropolitans derive their origin. In the mean time the bounds of the church were enlarged; the custom of holding councils was followed wherever the sound of the gospel had reached, and the universal church had now the appearance of one vast republic, formed by a combination of a great number of little states. This occasioned the creation of a new order of ecclesiastics, who were appointed, in different parts of the world, as heads of the church, and whose office it was to preserve the consistence and union of that immense body, whose members were so widely disperse d throughout the nations. Such was the nature and office of the *patriarchs*, among whom, at length, ambition being arrived at its most insolent period, formed a new dignity, investing the bishop of Rome, and his successors, with the title and authority of prince of the patriarchs.

The christian teachers had the good fortune to persuade the people that the ministers of the christian church succeeded to the character, rights, and privileges of the jewish priesthood; and this persuasion was a new source both of honors and profit to the sacred order. This notion was propagated with industry, some time after the reign of Adrian, when the second destruction of Jerusalem had extinguished among the jews all hope of seeing their government restored to its former lustre, and their country arising out of ruins. And accordingly the bishops considered themselves as invested with a rank and character similar to that of the *high priests* among the jews, while the *presbyters* represented the priests, and the *deacons* the *levites*. It is, indeed, highly probable, that they who first introduced this absurd comparison of offices, did it rather through ignorance and error, than through artifice or design. The notion, however, once introduced, produced its natural effects; and these effects were pernicious. The errors to which it gave rise were many, and one of its immediate consequences was, the establishing a greater difference between the christian pastors and their flocks than the genius of the gospel seems to admit.

From the government of the church let us turn our eyes to those who maintained its cause by their learned and judicious writings. Among these was Justin, a man of eminent piety and considerable learning, who, from a pagan philosopher became a christian martyr. He had frequented all the different sects of philosophy, in an ardent and impartial pursuit of truth; and finding, neither among stoics nor peripatetics, neither in the pythagorean nor platonic schools, any satisfactory account of the perfections of the Supreme Being, and the nature and destination of the human soul, he embraced christianity, on account of the light which it cast upon these interesting subjects. We have yet remaining two of his *apologics* in behalf of the Christians, which are deservedly held in high esteem; notwithstanding that, in some passages of them he shows himself an unwary disputer, and betrays a want of acquaintance with ancient history.

Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, a Greek by birth, and probably born of christian parents, a disciple also of Polycarp, by whom he was sent to preach the gospel among the Gauls, is another of the writers of this century, whose labors were singularly useful to the church. He turned his pen against

its internal and domestic enemies, by attacking the monstrous errors which were adopted by many of the primitive Christians, as appears by his five books against heresies, which are yet preserved in a Latin translation, and considered as one of the most precious monuments of ancient erudition.

Athenagoras also deserves a place among the estimable writers of this age. He was a philosopher of no mean reputation, and his *apology* for the Christians, as well as his Treatise upon the Resurrection, afford striking proofs of his learning and genius.

The works of Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, are more remarkable for their erudition, than for their order and method; this at least is true of his *three books in defence of christianity*, addressed to Autolycus. But the most illustrious writer of this century, and the most justly renowned for his various erudition and his perfect acquaintance with the ancient sages, was Clemens, the disciple of Pantænus, and the head of the Alexandrian school, destined for the instruction of the catechumens. His Stromata, Pedagogue, and Exhortation addressed to the Greeks, which are yet extant, abundantly show the extent of his learning and the force of his genius: though he is neither to be admired for the precision of his ideas, nor the perspicuity of his style. It is also to be lamented that his excessive attachment to the reigning philosophy led him into a variety of pernicious errors.

Hitherto we have made no mention of the Latin writers who employed their pens in the christian cause. And indeed, the only one of any note we find in this century is Tertullian, by birth a Carthagenian, who, having first embraced the profession of the law, became afterwards a presbyter of the church, and concluded by adopting the heretical visions of Montanus. He was a man of extensive learning, of a fine genius, and highly admired for his elocution in the Latin tongue. We have several works of his yet remaining, which were designed to explain and defend the truth, and to nourish pious affections in the hearts of Christians. There was, indeed, such a mixture in the qualities of this man, that it is difficult to fix his real character, and to determine which of the two were predominant, his virtues or his defects. He was endowed with a great genius, but seemed deficient in point of judgment. His piety was warm and vigorous, but at the same time melancholy and austere. His learning was extensive and profound; and yet his credulity and superstí-

tion were such as might have been expected from the darkest ignorance. And with respect to his reasonings, they had more of that subtilty that dazzles the imagination, than of that solidity that brings light and conviction to the mind.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY.

Simplicity of primitive christianity—altered by degrees—an example—zeal for the holy scriptures—the defects of the ancient interpreters—controversial writers—their qualities—moral writers—their merit—double doctrine of morality, gives rise to hermits—why—their progress—pious frauds—the lives of Christians—excommunication—penitential discipline.

The christian system, as it was hitherto taught preserved, its native and beautiful simplicity, and was comprehended in a small number of articles. The public teachers inculcated no other doctrines, than those that are contained in what is commonly called the *Apostles' Creed;* and, in the method of illustrating them, all vain subtilties, all mysterious researches, everything that was beyond the reach of common capacities, were carefully avoided. This will by no means appear surprising to those who consider, that at this time, there was not the least controversy about those capital doctrines of christianity, which were afterward so keenly debated in the church, and who reflect, that the bishops of these primitive times were, for the most part plain and illiterate men, remarkable rather for their piety and zeal, than for their learning and eloquence.

This venerable simplicity was not, indeed, of a long duration; its beauty was gradually effaced by the laborious efforts of human learning, and the dark subtilties of imaginary science. Acute researches were employed upon several religious subjects, concerning which ingenious decisions were pronounced; and, what was worst of all, several tenets of a chimerical philosophy were imprudently incorporated into the christian system. This disadvantageous change, this unhappy alteration of the primitive simplicity of the christian religion, was chiefly owing to two reasons; the one drawn from pride, and the other from a sort of necessity.—The former was the eagerness of certain learned men, to

bring about a union between the doctrines of christianity and the opinions of the philosophers; for they thought it a very fine accomplishment, to be able to express the precepts of Christ in the language of *philosophers*, *civilians* and *rabbins*. The other reason that contributed to alter the simplicity of the christian religion was, the necessity of having recourse to logical definitions and nice distinctions, in order to confound the sophistical arguments which the infidel and the heretic employed, the one to overturn the christian system, and the other to corrupt it. ☞These philosophical arms, in the hands of the judicious and wise, were both honorable and useful to religion; but when they came to be handled by every ignorant and self-sufficient meddler, as was afterward the case, they produced nothing but perplexity and confusion, under which genuine christianity almost disappeared.

Many examples might be alleged, which verify the observations we have now been making; and, if the reader is desirous of a striking one, he has only to take a view of the doctrines which began to be taught in this century, concerning the state of the soul after the dissolution of the body.—Jesus and his disciples had simply declared, that the souls of good men were, at their departure from their bodies, to be received into heaven, while those of the wicked were to be sent to hell; and this was sufficient for the first disciples of Christ to know, as they had more piety than curiosity, and were satisfied with the knowledge of this solemn fact, without any inclination to penetrate its *manner*, or to pry into its secret reasons. But this plain doctrine was soon disguised, when Platonism began to infect christianity. *Plato had taught, that the souls of heroes, of illustrious men, and eminent philosophers alone, ascended, after death, into the mansions of light and felicity; while those of the generality weighed down by their lusts and passions, sunk into the infernal regions, from whence they were not permitted to emerge, before they were purified from their turpitude and corruption.* This doctrine was seized with avidity by the Platonic Christians, and applied as a commentary upon that of Jesus. Hence a notion prevailed, that the *martyrs* only entered upon a state of happiness immediately after death, and that for the rest, a certain obscure region was assigned in which they were to be imprisoned until the second coming of Christ, or, at least, until they were purified from their various pollutions. This

doctrine, enlarged and improved upon by the irregular fancies of injudicious men, became a source of innumerable errors, vain ceremonies, and monstrous superstitions.

But, however the doctrines of the gospel may have been abused by the commentaries and interpretations of different sects, yet all were unanimous in regarding with veneration the holy scriptures, as the great rule of faith and manners; and hence that laudable and pious zeal of adapting them to general use. We have mentioned already the translations that were made of them into different languages, and it will not be improper to say something here concerning those who employed their useful labors in explaining and interpreting them. Pantænus, the head of the Alexandrian school, was probably the first who enriched the church with a version of the sacred writings, which has been lost among the ruins of time. The same fate attended the *commentary* of Clemens the Alexandrian, upon the *canonical epistles;* and also another celebrated work of the same author, in which he is said to have explained, in a compendious manner, almost all the sacred writings. The *harmony of the Evangelists*, composed by Tatian, is yet extant. But the *exposition of the Revelation*, by Justin Martyr, and of the *four gospels* by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, together with several illustrations of the Mosaic History of the creation, by other ancient writers, are all lost.

The loss of these ancient productions is the less to be regretted, as we know, with certainty, their vast inferiority to the expositions of the holy scriptures that appeared in succeeding times. Among the persons already mentioned, there was none who deserved the name of an eminent and judicious interpreter of the sacred text. They all attributed a *double sense* to the words of Scripture, the one *obvious* and literal, the other *hidden* and mysterious, which lay concealed, as it were, under the veil of the outward letter. The former they treated with tue utmost neglect, and turned the whole force of their genius and application to unfold the latter; or, in other words, they were more studious to *darken the holy scriptures with their idle fictions than to investigate their true and natural sense*, *Some of them also forced the expressions of sacred writ out of their obvious meaning in order to apply them to the support of their philosophical systems;* of which dangerous and pernicious attempts, Clemens, of Alexandria is said to have given the first example. With respect to

the expositors of the Old Testament in this century, we shall only make this general remark, that their excessive veneration for the Alexandrian version, commonly called the Septuagint, which they regarded almost of divine authority, confined their views, fettered, as it were, their critical spirit, and hindered them from producing any thing excellent in the way of sacred criticism or interpretation.

If this age was not very fertile in sacred criticisms, it was still less so in expositors of the doctrinal parts of religion; for hitherto there was no attempt made, at least that is come to our knowledge, of composing a *system*, or complete view of the christian doctrine. Some treaties of Arabian, relative to this subject, are indeed mentioned; but as they are lost, and seem not to have been much known by any of the writers whose works have survived them, we can form no conclusions concerning them. The books of Papias, concerning the *sayings of* Christ *and his apostles*, were, according to the accounts which Eusebius gives of them, rather an historical commentary, than a theological system. Melito, bishop of Sardis, is said to have written several treatises, one concerning *faith*, another on the *creation*, a third concerning the *church*, and a fourth concerning *truth*: but it does not appear from the titles of these writings, whether they were of a doctrinal or controversial nature. Several of The polemic writers, indeed, have been naturally led, in the course of controversy, to explain amply certain points of religion.—But those doctrines, which have not been disputed, are very rarely defined with such accuracy, by the ancient writers, as to point out to us clearly what their opinions concerning them were. And from hence it ought not to appear surprising, that all the different sects of Christians, pretend to find in the writings of the fathers, decisions favorable to their respective tenets.

The controversial writers, who shone in this century, had three different sorts of adversaries to combat; the Jews, the Pagans, and those, who, in the bosom of christianity, corrupted its doctrines, and produced various sects and divisions in the church. Justin Martyr, and Tertullian, embarked in a controversy with the Jews, which it was not possible for them to manage with the highest success and dexterity, as they were very little acquainted with the language, the history, and the learning of the Hebrews, and wrote with more levity and inaccuracy, than was justifiable on such a

subject. Of those who managed the cause of christianity against the pagans, some performed this important task by composing *apologies* for the Christians; and others by addressing pathetic exhortations to the Gentiles. Among the former were Athenagoras, Melito, Quadratus, Miltiades, Aristides, Tatian, and Justin Martyr; and among the latter, Tertullian, Clemens, Justin, and Theophilus bishop of Antioch. All these writers attacked, with judgment, dexterity and success, the pagan superstition, and also defended the Christians, in a victorious manner, against all the calumnies and aspersions of their enemies. But they did not succeed so well in unfolding the true nature and genius of christianity, nor were the arguments they made use of to demonstrate its truth and divinity so full of energy, so striking and irresistible, as those by which they overturned the pagan system. In a word, both their explication and defence of many of the doctrines of christianity are defective and unsatisfactory in several respects. As to those who directed their polemic efforts against the heretics, their number was prodigious, though few of their writings have come down to our times. Irenæus refuted the whole tribe, in a work destined solely for that purpose. Clemens, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, wrote also against all the sectaries; but the work of the last, upon that subject is not extant. It would be endless to mention those who combated particular errors, of whose writings, also, many have disappeared amidst the decays of time, and the revolutions that have happened in the republic of letters.

If the primitive defenders of christianity were not always happy in the choice of their arguments, yet they discovered more candor and probity than those of the following ages. The artifice of sophistry, and the habit of employing pious frauds in support of the truth, had not, as yet, infected the Christians. And this indeed, is all that can be said in their behalf; for they are worthy of little admiration on account of the accuracy or depth of their reasonings. The most of them appear to have been destitute of penetration, learning, order, application, and force. They frequently make use of arguments, void of all solidity, and much more proper to dazzle the fancy, than to enlighten and convince the mind. One, laying aside the sacred writings, from whence all the weapons of religious controversy ought to be drawn, refers to the decisions of those bishops who ruled the apostolic

churches. Another thinks, that the antiquity of a doctrine is a mark of its truth, and pleads prescription against his adversaries, as if he was maintaining his property before a civil magistrate; than which method of disputing nothing can be more pernicious to the cause of truth. A third imitated those wrong headed disputants among the Jews, who, infatuated with their cabalistic jargon, offered as arguments, the imaginary *powers* of certain mystic words and chosen numbers. Nor do they seem to err, who are of opinion, that in this century, that vicious method of disputing which afterward obtained the name of *economical*, was first introduced.

The principal points of morality were treated of by Justin Martyr, or at least by the writer of the epistle to Zena and Serenus which is to be found among the works of that celebrated author. Many other writers confined themselves to particular branches of the moral system, which they handled with much attention and zeal. Thus Clemens, of Alexandria, wrote several treatises concerning *calumny*, *patience*, *continence*, and other virtues, which discourses have not reached our times. Those of Tertullian upon *chastity*, upon *flight in the time of persecution*, as also upon *fasting*, *shows*, *female ornaments* and *prayer*, have survived the waste of time, and might be read with much fruit, were the style in which they are written less labored and difficult, and the spirit they breathe less melancholy and morose.

Learned men are not unanimous concerning the degree of esteem that is due to the authors now mentioned, and the other ancient moralists. Some represent them as the most excellent guides in the paths of piety and virtue; while others place them in the very lowest rank of moral writers, consider them as the very worst of all instructors, and treat their decisions as perfectly insipid, and in many respects pernicious. We leave the decision of this point to such as are more capable of pronouncing decisively upon it than we pretend to be. It however appears to us incontestible, that in the writings of the primitive fathers, there are several sublime sentiments, judicious thoughts, and many things that are naturally adapted to form a religious temper, and to excite pious and virtuous affections; while it must be confessed, on the other hand, that they abound still more with precepts of an excessive and unreasonable austerity, with stoical and academical dictates, vague and indeterminate notions and what is yet worse, with decisions that are ab-

solutely false, and in evident opposition to the precepts of Christ. Before the question mentioned above, concerning the merit of the ancient fathers, as moralists, be decided, a previous question must be determined, viz. What is meant by a bad director in point of morals? and, if by such a person be meant one who has no determinate notion of the nature and limits of the duties incumbent upon Christians, no clear and distinct ideas of virtue and vice, who has not penetrated the spirit and genius of those sacred books, to which alone we must appeal in every dispute about christian virtue, and who, in consequence thereof, fluctuates often in uncertainty, or falls into error in explaining the divine laws; though he may frequently administer sublime and pathetic instruction; if by a bad guide in morals, such a person as we have now delineated, be meant, then it must be confessed, that this title belongs indisputably to many of the fathers.

The cause of morality, and, indeed, of christianity in general, suffered deeply by a capital error which was received in this century; an error admitted without any evil design, but yet with the utmost imprudence, and which, through every period of the church, even until the present time, has produced other errors without number, and multiplied the evils under which the gospel has so often groaned. Jesus Christ prescribed to his disciples, one and all, the same rule of life and manners. But certain christian teachers, either through a desire of imitating the nations among whom they lived, or in consequence of a natural propensity to a life of austerity, which is a disease not uncommon in Syria, Egypt, and other eastern provinces, were induced to maintain that Christ had established a *double rule of sanctity and virtue*, for two different orders of Christians. Of these rules the one was ordinary, the other extraordinary; the one of a lower dignity, the other more sublime; the one for persons in the active scenes of life, the other for those, who in a sacred retreat, aspired after the glory of a celestial state. In consequence of this wild system they divided into two parts all those moral doctrines and instructions which they had received either by writing or tradition. One of these divisions they called *precepts*, and the other *counsels*. They gave the name of precepts to those laws which were universally obligatory upon all orders of men; and that of counsels to those that related to Christians of a more sublime rank, who pro-

posed to themselves great and glorious ends, and breathed after an intimate communion with the Supreme Being.

This *double doctrine* produced, all of a sudden, a new set of men, who made profession of uncommon degrees of sanctity and virtue, and declared their resolution of obeying all the *counsels* of Christ, in order to their enjoying communion with God here; and also, that after the dissolution of their mortal bodies, they might ascend to him with the greater facility, and find nothing to retard their approach to the supreme centre of happiness and affection. They looked upon themselves as prohibited the use of things, which it was lawful for other Christians to enjoy, such as *wine*, *flesh*, *matrimony*, and *commerce*. They thought it their indispensable duty to extenuate the body by watchings, abstinence, labor, and hunger. They looked for felicity in solitary retreats, in desert places, where, by severe and assiduous efforts of sublime meditation, they raised the soul above all external objects and all sensual pleasures. Both men and women imposed on themselves the most severe tasks, the most austere discipline; all which, however the fruit of pious intention, was, in the issue, extremely detrimental to christianity. These persons were called ascetics, (spoudaioi eclectoi) and philosophers; nor were they only distinguished by their title from other Christians, but also by their garb. In this century, indeed, such as embraced this austere kind of life submitted themselves to all these mortifications in private, without breaking asunder their social bonds, or withdrawing themselves from the concourse of men. But, in process of time they retired into deserts; and, after the example of the Essenes and Therapeutæ, they formed themselves into certain companies.

Nothing is more obvious than the reasons that gave rise to this austere sect. One of the principal was the ill-judged ambition of the Christians to resemble the Greeks and Romans, many of whose sages and philosophers distinguished themselves from the generality by their maxims, by their habit, and indeed by the whole plan of life and manners which they had formed to themselves, and by which they acquired a high degree of esteem and authority. It is also well known that of all these philosophers there were none whose sentiments and discipline were so well received by the ancient Christians as those of the platonics and pythagoreans, who prescribed in their lessons two rules of con-

duct; one for the sages, who aspired to the sublimest heights of virtue, and another for the people, involved in the cares and hurry of an active life. The law of moral conduct, which the platonics prescribed to the philosophers, was as follows: "the soul of the wise man ought to be removed to the greatest possible distance from the contagious influence of the body. And as the depressing weight of the body, the force of its appetites, and its connections with a corrupt world, are in direct opposition to this sacred obligation; therefore all sensual pleasures are to be carefully avoided, the body is to be supported, or rather extenuated, by a slender diet; *solitude* is to be sought as the true mansion of virtue; and *contemplation* to be employed as the means of raising the soul, as far as is possible, to a sublime freedom from all corporeal ties, and to a noble elevation above all terrestrial things. The person who lives in this manner shall enjoy, even in the present state, a certain degree of communion with the Deity; and when the corporeal mass is dissolved, shall immediately ascend to the sublime regions of felicity and perfection, without passing through that state of purification and trial that awaits the generality of mankind." It is easy to perceive, that this rigorous discipline was a natural consequence of the peculiar opinions which these philosophers, and some others that resembled them, entertained, concerning the *nature of the soul*, the *influence of matter*, the *operations of invisible beings or demons*, and the *formation of the world*. And as these opinions were adopted by the more learned among the Christians, it was but natural that they should embrace also the moral discipline which flowed from them.

There is a particular consideration that will enable us to render a natural account of the origin of those religious severities, of which we have been now speaking, and that is drawn from the genius of the people by whom they were first practised. It was in Egypt that this morose discipline had its rise; and it is observable, that that country has, in all times, as it were by an immutable law, or disposition of nature, abounded with persons of a melancholy complexion and produced, in proportion to its extent, more gloomy spirits than other part of the world. It was here that the Essenes and the Therapeutæ, those gloomy sects, dwelt principally, long before the coming of Christ; as also many others of the ascetic tribe; who, led by a certain melancholy turn

of mind, and a delusive notion of rendering themselves more acceptable to the Deity by their austerities, withdrew themselves from human society, and from all the innocent pleasures of life. From Egypt this sour and unsociable discipline passed into Syria, and the neighboring countries, which also abounded with persons of the same dismal constitution with that of the Egyptians, and from thence, in process of time, its infection reached the European nations. Hence that train of austere and superstitious vows and rites, that yet, in many places, cast a veil over the beauty and simplicity of the christian religion. Hence the celibacy of the priestly order, the rigor of unprofitable penances and mortifications, the innumerable swarms of monks that refused their talents and labors to society, and this in pursuit of a visionary sort of perfection. Hence also that distinction between the *theoretical* and *mystical* life, and many other fancies of a like nature, which we shall have occasion to mention, in the course of this history.

It is generally true, that delusions travel in a train, and that one mistake produces many. The Christians who adopted the austere system already mentioned, had certainly made a very false step, and done much injury to their excellent and most reasonable religion. But they did not stop here; another erroneous practise was adopted by them, which, though it was not so universal as the other, was yet extremely pernicious, and proved a source of numberless evils to the christian church. The platonists and pythagoreans held it as a maxim, that it was not only lawful, but even praiseworthy to *deceive*, and even to use the expedient of a *lie*, in order to advance the cause of *truth* and *piety*. The Jews, who lived in Egypt, had learned and received this maxim from them, before the coming of Christ, as appears incontestably from a multitude of ancient records; and the Christians were infected from both these sources with the same pernicious error, as appears from the number of books attributed falsely to great and venerable names, from the Sibylline verses, and several suppositious productions which were spread abroad in this and the following century. It does not, indeed, seem probable that all these *pious frauds* were chargeable upon the professors of *real* christianity, upon those who entertained just and reasonable sentiments of the religion of Jesus. The greatest part of these fictitious writings undoubtedly flowed from the fertile invention of the

gnostic sects, though it cannot be affirmed that even true Christians were entirely innocent and irreproachable in this matter.

As the boundaries of the church were enlarged, the number of vicious and irregular persons who entered into it were proportionably increased, as appears from the many complaints and censures that we find from the writers of this century. Several methods were made use of, to stem the torrent of iniquity. *Excommunication* was peculiarly employed to prevent or punish the most heinous and enormous crimes; and the crimes esteemed such were *murder*, *idolatry*, and *adultery*, which terms, however, we must here understand in their more full and extensive sense. In some places, the commission of any of these sins cut off irrevocably the criminal from all hopes of restoration to the privileges of church communion; in others, after a long, laborious, and painful course of probation, and discipline, they were re-admitted into the bosom of the church.

It is here to be attentively observed, that the form used in the exclusion of heinous offenders from the society of Christians, was, at first, extremely simple. A small number of plain, yet judicious rules, made up the whole of this solemn institution, which, however, was imperceptibly altered, enlarged by an addition of a vast multitude of rites, and new modelled, according to the discipline used in tue heathen mysteries. Those who have any acquaintance with the singular reasons that obliged the Christians of those ancient times to be careful in restraining the progress of vice, will readily grant, that it was incumbent on the rulers of the church to perfect their discipline, and to render the restraints upon iniquity more severe. They will justify the rulers of the primitive church in their refusing to restore excommunicated members to their forfeited privileges, before they had given incontestable marks of the sincerity of their repentance. Yet still it remains to be examined, whether it was expedient to borrow from the enemies of truth the rules of this salutary discipline, and thus to sanctify, in some measure, a part of the heathen superstition. But, however delicate such a question may be, when determined with a view to all the indirect or immediate consequences of the matter, in debate, the equitable and candid judge will consider principally the good intention of those from whom these ceremonies and institutions proceed, and will overlook

the rest, from a charitable condescension and indulgence to human weakness.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE CEREMONIES USED IN THE CHURCH DURING THIS PERIOD.

Ceremonies multiplied—the causes—the christian assemblies—disputes about Easter—prevailed between the Asiatics and Romans—celebration of the Lord's supper—baptism.

There is no institution so pure and excellent, which the corruption and folly of man will not, in time, alter for the worse, and load with additions foreign to its nature and original design. Such, in a particular manner, was the fate of christianity! In this century, many unnecessary rites and ceremonies were added to the christian worship, the introduction of which was extremely offensive to wise and good men. These changes, while they destroyed the *beautiful simplicity of the gospel*, were naturally pleasing to the *gross multitude*, who are more delighted with the pomp and splendor of external institutions, than with the native charms of *rational and solid picty*, and who generally give little attention to any objects but those which strike their outward senses. But other reasons may be added to this, which, though they suppose no bad intentions, yet manifest a considerable degree of precipitation and imprudence.

And here we may observe in the first place, that there is a high degree of probability in the notion of those who think that the bishops augmented the number of religious rites in the christian worship by way of accommodation to the infirmities and prejudices of both Jews and heathens, in order thus to facilitate their conversion to christianity. Both Jews and heathens were accustomed to a vast variety of pompous and magnificent ceremonies in their religious service. And as they considered these rites as an essential part of religion, it was but natural that they should behold with indifference, and even with contempt, the simplicity of the christian worship, which was destitute of those idle ceremonies that rendered their service so specious and striking. To remove, then, in some measure, this prejudice against christianity, the bishops thought it necessary to increase the

number of rites and ceremonies, and thus to render the public worship more striking to the outward senses.

This addition of outward rites was also designed to remove the opprobrious calumnies which the Jewish and pagan priests cast upon the Christians, on account of the simplicity of their worship, esteeming them little better than atheists, because they had no *temples*, *altars*, *victims*, *priests*, nor anything of that external pomp, in which the vulgar are so prone to place the essence of religion. The rulers of the church adopted therefore certain external ceremonies, that thus they might captivate the senses of the vulgar, and be able to refute the reproaches of their enemies. ☞This, it must be confessed, was a very awkward and indeed a very pernicious stratagem; it was obscuring the native lustre of the gospel, in order to extend its influence, and making it lose in point of real excellence what it gained in popular esteem. Some accommodations to the infirmities of mankind, some prudent instances of condescension to their invincible prejudices, are necessary in ecclesiastical as well as in civil institutions; but they must be of such a nature as not to inspire ideas, or encourage prejudices, incompatible with just sentiments of the great object of religious worship, and of the fundamental truths which God has imparted by reason and revelation to the human race. How far this rule has been disregarded and violated, will appear too plainly in the progress of this history.

A third cause of the multiplication of rites and ceremonies in the christian church may be deduced from the abuse of certain titles that distinguished the sacerdotal orders among the Jews. Every one knows, that many terms used in the New Testament, to express the different parts of the christian doctrine and worship are borrowed from the jewish law, or have a certain analogy with the rites and ceremonies instituted by Moses. The christian teachers did not only imitate this analogical manner of speaking, but they even extended it further than the apostles had done. And though in this there was nothing worthy of reproach, yet the consequences of this method of speaking became, through abuse, detrimental to the purity of the gospel. For, in process of time, many asserted, whether through ignorance or artifice is not easy to determine, that the forms of speech were not *figurative*, but highly *proper*, and exactly suitable to the nature of the things they were designed to express. The *bish-*

ops, by an innocent allusion to the jewish manner of speaking, had been called *chief priests;* the *elders* or presbyters had received the title of *priests*, and the *deacons* that of *levites*. But, in a little time these titles were abused by an aspiring clergy, who thought proper to claim the same rank and station, the same rights and privileges that were conferred with those titles upon the ministers of religion, under the Mosaic dispensation. Hence the rise of *tithes*, *first fruits*, *splendid garments*, and many other circumstances of external grandeur, by which ministers were eminently distinguished. In like manner the comparison of the christian *oblations* with the jewish *victims* and *sacrifices* produced a multitude of unnecessary rites, and was the occasion of introducing that erroneous notion of the *eucharist*, which represents it as a *real sacrifice*, and not merely as a commemoration of that great *offering* that was made upon the cross for the sins of mortals.

The profound respect that was paid to the Greek and Roman *mysteries*, and the extraordinary sanctity that was attributed to them, was another circumstance that induced the Christians to give their religion *a mystic air*, in order to put it upon an equal foot, in point of dignity, with that of the pagans. For this purpose they gave the name of *mysteries* to the institutions of the gospel, and decorated particularly the holy sacrament with that solemn title. They used in that sacred institution, as also in that of baptism, several of the terms employed in the heathen mysteries; and proceeded so far, at length, as even to adopt some of the rites and ceremonies of which these renowned mysteries consisted. This imitation began in the eastern provinces, but after the time of Adrian, who first introduced the mysteries among the Latins, it was followed by the Christians who dwelt in the western parts of the empire. A great part, therefore, of the service of the church, in this century, had a certain air of the heathen mysteries, and resembled them considerably in many particulars.

It may be yet further observed, that the custom of teaching their religious doctrines by *images*, *actions*, *signs*, and other sensible representations, which prevailed among the Egyptians, and indeed in almost all the eastern nations, was another cause of the increase of external rites in the church. As there were many persons of narrow capacities, whose comprehension scarcely extended beyond sensible objects, the christian teachers thought it advisable to instruct such

in the essential truths of the gospel, by placing these truths as it were before their eyes, under sensible images. Thus they administered *milk* and *honey*, which was the ordinary food of infants, to such as were newly received into the church, showing them, by this sign, that *by their baptism they were born again* and were bound to manifest the simplicity and innocence of infants in their lives and conversations. Certain military rites were borrowed to express the new and solemn engagements by which Christians attached themselves to Christ as their leader and chief; and the ancient ceremony of *manumission* was used to signify the liberty of which they were made partakers, in consequence of their redemption from the guilt and dominion of sin, and their deliverance from the empire of the prince of darkness.

If it be considered, in the first place, that the Christians who composed the church were Jews and heathens, accustomed, from their birth, to various insignificant ceremonies and superstitious rites; and if it be also considered, that such a long course of custom and education forms prejudices that are extremely obstinate and difficult to be conquered, it will then appear that nothing less than a continued miracle could have totally prevented the entrance of all superstitious mixtures into the christian worship. A single example will tend to the illustration of this matter. Before the coming of Christ all the eastern nations performed divine worship with their faces turned to that part of the heavens where the sun displays his rising beams. This custom was founded upon a general opinion, that God, whose *essence* they looked upon to be *light*, and whom they considered as circumscribed within certain limits, dwelt in that part of the firmament, from whence he sends forth the sun, the bright image of his benignity and glory. They who embraced the christian religion rejected, indeed, this gross error, but they retained the ancient and universal custom of worshiping toward the east which sprung from it. Nor is that custom abolished in our times, but still prevails in a great number of christian churches. From this same source arose various rites, among the Jews, which many Christians, especially those who live in the eastern countries, observe religiously at this very day.

We shall take no more than a brief view of these rites and ceremonies, since a particular detail would lead us into endless discussions, and open a field too vast to be comprehended in such a history as we here give of the christian church.

The first Christians assembled for the purposes of divine worship, in *private houses*, in *caves*, and in *vaults*, where the dead were buried. Their meetings were on the *first day of the week*, and in some places they assembled also on the *seventh*, which was celebrated by the Jews. Many also observed the *fourth* day of the week, on which Christ was betrayed; and the *sixth*, which was the day of his crucifixion. The hour of the day, appointed for holding these religious assemblies varied, according to the different times and circumstances of the church; but it was generally in the evening after sunset, or in the morning before the dawn. During these sacred meetings prayers were repeated, the holy scriptures were publicly read, short discourses, upon the duties of Christians were addressed to the people, hymns were sung, and a portion of the oblations, presented by the faithful, was employed in the celebration of the Lord's supper, and the feasts of charity.

The Christians of this century celebrated anniversary festivals, in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the effusion of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles. The day which was observed as the anniversary of Christ's death, was called the *paschal* day, or passover, because it was looked upon to be the same as that on which the Jews celebrated the feast of that name. In the manner, however, of observing this solemn day, the Christians of the Lesser Asia differed much from the rest, and in a more especial manner from those of Rome. They both, indeed, fasted, during the *great week*—so that was called in which Christ died—and afterward celebrated, like the Jews, a sacred feast, at which they distributed a paschal lamb, in memory of our Savior's last supper. But the Asiatic Christians kept this feast on the fourteenth day of the first jewish month, at the time that the Jews celebrated their passover, and three days after, commemorated the resurrection of the triumphant Redeemer. They affirmed, that they had derived this custom from the apostles John and Philip, and pleaded, moreover, in its behalf, the example of Christ himself, who held his *pashal feast* on the same day that the Jews celebrated their *passover*. The western churches observed a different method. They celebrated their *paschal* feast on the night that preceded the anniversary of Christ's resurrection, and thus connected the Savior's crucifixion, with that of his victory over death and the grave. Nor did they differ thus from

the Asiatics, without alleging also apostolic authority for what they did; for they pleaded that of St. Peter and St. Paul, as a justification of their conduct in this matter.

The Asiatic rule for keeping the *paschal feast*, was attended with two great inconveniences, to which the Christians at Alexandria and Rome, and the whole western churches refused to submit. For, in the first place, as the Asiatics celebrated their festival the same day that Christ is said to have ate the paschal lamb with his disciples, this occasioned an inevitable interruption in the fast of the *great week*, which the other churches looked upon as almost criminal, at least as highly indecent. Nor was this the only inconveniency arising from this rule; for as they celebrated the memory of Christ's resurrection, precisely the third day after their paschal supper, it happened, for the most part, that this great festival, which was afterwards called by the Latins pascha and to which we give the name of *Easter*, was held on other days of the week than the *first*. This circumstance was extremely displeasing to by far the greatest part of the Christians, who thought it unlawful to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord on any day but *Sunday*, as that was the day on which this glorious event happened. Hence arose sharp and vehement contentions between the Asiatic and western Christians. About the middle of this century, during the reign of Antoninus Pius, the venerable Polycarp came to Rome, to confer with Anicet, bishop of that see, upon this matter, with a view to terminate the warm disputes it had occasioned. But this conference, though conducted with great decency and moderation, was without effect. Polycarp and Anicet were only agreed in this, that the bonds of charity were not to be broken on account of this controversy, but they continued at the same time, each in their former sentiments, nor could the Asiatics be engaged, by any arguments, to alter the rule which they pretended to have received by tradition from St. John.

Toward the conclusion of this century Victor, bishop of Rome, took it into his head to force the Asiatic Christians, by the pretended authority of his laws and decrees, to follow the rule which was observed in the western churches in this matter. Accordingly, after having taken the advice of some foreign bishops, he wrote an imperious letter to the Asiatic prelates, commanding them to imitate the example of the western Christians, with respect to the time of celebrating

the festival of Easter. The Asiatics answered this lordly summons by the pen of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, who declared, in their name, and that with great spirit and resolution, that they would by no means depart, in this matter, from the custom handed down to them by their ancestors. Upon this the thunder of excommunication began to roar. Victor, exasperated by this resolute answer of the Asiatic bishops, broke communion with them, pronounced them unworthy the name of his brethren, and excluded them from all fellowship with the church of Rome. This excommunication, indeed, extended no further; nor could it cut off the Asiatic bishops from communion with the other churches, whose bishops were far from approving the conduct of Victor. The progress of this violent dissension was stopped by the wise and moderate remonstrances which Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, addressed to the Roman prelate upon this occasion, in which he showed him the imprudence and injustice of the step he had taken, and also by the long letter which the Asiatic Christians wrote in their own justification. In consequence therefore of this cessation of arms the combatants retained each their own customs, until the fourth century, when the council of Nice abolished that of the Asiatics, and rendered the time of the celebration of Easter the same through all the christian churches.

In these times the sacrament of the Lord's supper was celebrated, for the most part, on Sundays, and the ceremonies observed upon that occasion were such as follow: a part of the bread and wine which was presented, among the other *oblations* of the faithful, was separated from the rest, and consecrated by the prayers of the bishop. The wine was mixed with water, and the bread was divided into several portions. A part of the consecrated bread and wine was carried to the sick or absent members of the church, as a testimony of fraternal love, sent them by the whole society. It appears by many and undoubted testimonies, that this holy rite was looked upon as essential to salvation; and we shall be less disposed to censure as erroneous, the opinion of those who have affirmed that the *Lord's supper was administered to infants* during this century. The feasts of charity that followed the celebration of the Lord's supper, have been mentioned already. The sacrament of baptism was administered publicly twice every year, at the festivals of Easter and Pentecost or Whitsuntide, either by the bishop or the

presbyters, in consequence of his authorization and appointment. The persons that were to be baptized, after they had repeated the *creed*, confessed and renounced their sins, and particularly *the devil*, and his pompous allurements, were immersed under water, and received into Christ's kingdom by a solemn invocation of *Father*, *Son*, *and Holy Ghost*, according to the express command of our Blessed Lord. After baptism, they received the *sign of the cross*, were anointed, and by *prayers* and *imposition of hands*, were solemnly commended to the mercy of God, and dedicated to his service; in consequence of which they received *milk* and *honey*, which concluded the ceremony. The reasons of this particular ritual coincide with what we have said in general concerning the origin and causes of the multiplied ceremonies that crept from time to time into the church.

Adult persons were prepared for baptism by abstinence, prayer, and other pious exercises. It was to answer for them that sponsors or godfathers were first instituted, though they were afterwards admitted also in the baptism of infants.

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THE HERESIES AND DIVISIONS THAT TROUBLED THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

Origin of the Nazarenes and Ebionites—sects that arose from the oriental philosophy—Elxai and his followers—Saturninus and his extravagant fanatics Cerdo—Marcion—Bardesanes—Tatian—Egyptian gnostics—Basilides—his bad doctrine—Carpocrates—Valentine—his idle dreams—various sects from him—the Ophites—Patropassians—Theodotus and Artemon—Hermogenes—Montanus—his doctrine and success.

Among the many sects which divided the Christian church during this century, it is natural to mention, in the first place, that which an attachment to the Mosaic law separated from the rest of their Christian brethren. The first rise of this sect is placed under the reign of Adrian. For, when this emperor had, at length, razed Jerusalem, entirely destroyed even its very foundations, and enacted laws of the severest kind against the whole body of the Jewish people; the greatest part of the Christians who lived in Palestine, to prevent their being confounded with the Jews, abandoned entirely

the Mosaic rites, and chose a bishop, named Mark, a foreigner by nation, and consequently an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. This step was highly shocking to those whose attachment to the Mosaic rites was violent and invincible; and such was the case of many. These, therefore, separated themselves from the brethren, and founded at Pera, a country of Palestine, and in the neighboring parts, particular assemblies, in which the law of Moses maintained its primitive dignity, authority, and lustre.

This body of judaizing Christians, which set Christ and Moses upon an equal foot, in point of authority, was afterward divided into two sects, extremely different both in their rites and in their opinions, and distinguished by the names of Nazarenes and Ebionites. The former are not placed by the ancient Christians in the heretical register; but the latter were considered as a sect, whose tenets were destructive of the fundamental principles of the christian religion. These sects made use of a *gospel* or history of Christ, different from that which is received among us, and concerning which there have been many disputes among the learned. The term Nazarenes was not originally the name of a sect, but that which distinguished the disciples of Jesus in general. And as those, whom the Greeks called Christians, received the name of Nazarenes among the Jews, this latter name was not considered as a mark of ignominy or contempt. Those, indeed, who, after their separation from their brethren, retained the title of Nazarenes, differed much from the true disciples of Christ, to whom that name had been originally given; "they held, that Christ was born of a virgin, and was also in a *certain manner* united to the divine nature; they refused to abandon the ceremonies prescribed by the law of Moses, but were far from attempting to impose the observance of these ceremonies upon the Gentile Christians; they rejected also all those additions that were made to the Mosaic institutions by the pharisees and the teachers of the law; and from hence we may easily see the reason why the greatest part of the Christians treated the Nazarenes with a more than ordinary degree of gentleness and forbearance.

It is a doubtful matter from whence the Ebionites derived their name, whether from that of some of their principal teachers, or from their poverty. One thing, however, is certain, and that is, that their sentiments and doctrines were

more pernicious than those of the Nazarenes. For though they believed the celestial mission of Christ, and his participation of a divine nature, yet they regarded him as a man born of Joseph and Mary, according to the ordinary course of nature. They, moreover, asserted, that the ceremonial law, instituted by Moses, was not only obligatory upon the Jews, but also upon all others; and that the observance of it was essential to salvation. And as St. Paul had very different sentiments from them, concerning the obligation of the ceremonial law, and had opposed the observance of it in the warmest manner, so of consequence they held this apostle in abhorrence, and treated his writings with the utmost disrespect. Nor were they only attached to the rites instituted by Moses; they went still further, and received, with an equal degree of veneration, the superstitions of their ancestors, and the ceremonies and traditions which the Pharisees presumptuously added to the law.

These obscure and unfrequented heretical assemblies were very little detrimental to the christian cause, which suffered more from those sects, whose leaders explained the doctrines of christianity in a manner conformable to the dictates of the oriental philosophy concerning the origin of evil. The oriental teachers, who, before this century had lived in the greatest obscurity, came forth from their retreat under the reign of Adrian, exposed themselves to public view, and gathered together, in various provinces, assemblies, whose numbers were very considerable. The ancient records mention a great number of these demi-christian sects, many of which are no further known by their distinguishing names, which perhaps, is the only circumstance in which they differ from each other. One division, however, of these oriental Christians, may be considered as real and important, since the two branches it produced were vastly superior to the rest in reputation, and made more noise in the world, than the other multiplied subdivisions of this pernicious sect.—Of this famous division, one branch, which arose in Asia, preserved the oriental doctrine concerning the origin of the world, unmixed with other sentiments and opinions; while the other, which was formed in Egypt, made a motley mixture of this philosophy with the tenets and prodigies adopted in the religious system of that superstitious country. The doctrine of the former surpassed in simplicity and perspicuity that of the latter, which consisted of a vast variety of

parts, so artfully combined, that the explication of them became a matter of much difficulty.

Among the teachers of the Asiatic branch, the first place is due to Elxai, a Jew, who, during the reign of Trajan, is said to have formed the sect of the Elcesaites. This heretic, though a Jew, attached to the worship of one God, and full of veneration for Moses, corrupted, nevertheless, the religion of his ancestors, by blending with it a multitude of fictions drawn from the oriental philosophy; pretending also, after the example of the Essenes, to give a rational explication of the law of Moses, he reduced it to a mere allegory. It is, at the same time, proper to observe, that some have doubted whether the Elcesaites are to be reckoned among the christian or the jewish sects; and Epiphanius, who was acquainted with a certain production of Elxai, expresses his uncertainty in this matter. Elxai, indeed, in that book, mentions Christ with the highest encomiums, without, however, adding any circumstance from whence it might be concluded with certainty, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of whom he spoke.

If then Elxai be improperly placed among the leaders of the sect now under consideration, we may place at its head Saturninus of Antioch, who is one of the first gnostic chiefs mentioned in history. He held the doctrine of *two principles* from whence proceeded all things; the one *a wise* and *benevolent deity;* and the other, *matter, a principle essentially evil*, and which he supposed under the superintendance of a certain intelligence of a malignant nature. "The world and its first inhabitants were, according to the system of this raving philosopher, created by seven angels, which presided over the seven planets. This work was carried on without the knowledge of the *benevolent deity*, and in opposition to the will of the *material principle*. The former, however, beheld it with approbation, and honored it with several marks of his beneficence. He endowed with rational souls the beings who inhabited this new system, to whom their creators had imparted nothing more than mere animal life; and having divided the world into seven parts, he distributed them among the seven *angelic architects*, one of whom was the god of the Jews; and reserved to himself the supreme empire over all. To these creatures, whom the *benevolent principle* had endowed with reasonable souls, and with dispositions that led to goodness and virtue, the *evil being*, to maintain

his empire, added another king, whom he formed of a wicked and malignant character; and hence the difference we see among men. When the creators of the world fell from their allegiance to the Supreme Deity, God sent from heaven into our globe, a *Restorer of order*, whose name was Christ. This divine Conqueror came clothed with a corporeal appearance, but not with a *real* body; he came to destroy the empire of the *material principle*, and to point out to virtuous souls the way by which they must return to God. This way is beset with difficulties and sufferings; since those souls who propose returning to the Supreme Being after the dissolution of this mortal body, must abstain from wine, flesh, wedlock, and, in short, from every thing that tends to sensual gratification, or even bodily refreshment." Saturninus taught these extravagant doctrines in Syria, but principally at Antioch, and drew after him many disciples by the pompous appearance of an extraordinary virtue.

Cerdo the Syrian, and Marcion, son of the bishop of Pontus, belong to the Asiatic sect, though they began to establish their doctrine at Rome, and having given a turn somewhat different to the oriental superstition, may themselves be considered as the heads of a new sect which bears their names. Amid the obscurity and doubts that render so uncertain the history of these two men, the following fact is incontestable, viz. that Cerdo had been spreading his doctrine at Rome before the arrival of Marcion there; and that the latter having, through his own misconduct, forfeited a place to which he aspired in the church of Rome, attached himself through resentment, to the impostor Cerdo, and propagated his impious doctrines with an astonishing success throughout the world. "After the example of the oriental teachers, they held the existence of *two principles*, the one perfectly *good*, and the other perfectly *evil*. Between these, they imagined an *intermediate kind of a deity*, neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil, but *of a mixed nature*, so Marcion expresses it, and so far just and powerful, as to administer rewards and inflict punishments. This *middle deity* is the creator of this inferior world, and the *god and legislator of the jewish nation:* he wages perpetual war with the *evil principle;* and both the one and the other aspire to the place of the Supreme Being, and ambitiously attempt subjecting to their authority all the inhabitants of the world. The Jews are the subjects of that powerful *genius* who formed this globe; the other na-

tions, who worship a variety of gods, are under the empire of the *evil principle*. Both these conflicting powers exercise oppressions upon rational and immortal souls, and keep them in a tedious and interminable captivity. Therefore, the Supreme God, in order to terminate this war, and to deliver from their bondage those souls whose origin is celestial and divine, sent to the Jews a *being* most like unto himself, even his son Jesus Christ, clothed with a certain shadowy resemblance of a body, that thus he might be visible to mortal eyes. The commission of this celestial Messenger was to destroy the empire both of the *evil principle* and of the *author of this world*, and to bring back wandering souls to God. On this account he was attacked, with inexpressible violence and fury by the *prince of darkness*, and by the *god of the Jews*, but without effect, since, having a body only in appearance, he was thereby rendered incapable of suffering. Those who follow the sacred directions of this celestial comforter mortify the body by fastings and austerities, call off their minds from the allurements of sense, and, renouncing the precepts of the god of the Jews, and of the prince of darkness, turn their eyes toward the Supreme Being, shall, after death, ascend to the mansions of felicity and perfection." In consequence of all this, the rule of manners which Marcion prescribed to his followers was excessively austere, containing an express prohibition of wedlock, of the use of wine, flesh, and of all the external comforts of life. Notwithstanding the rigor of this severe discipline great numbers embraced the doctrines of Marcion, of whom Lucan, or Lucian, Severus, Blastes, and principally Appelles, are said to have varied, in some things, from the opinions of their master, and to have formed new sects.

Bardesanes and Tatian are commonly supposed to have been of the school of Valentine, the Egyptian. But this notion is entirely without foundation, since their doctrine differs in many things from that of the Valentines, approaching nearer to that of the oriental philosophy, concerning the *two principles*. Bardesanes, native of Edessa, was a man of a very acute genius, and acquired a shining reputation by his writings, which were in great number, and valuable for the profound erudition they contained. Seduced by the fantastic charms of the oriental philosophy, he adopted it with zeal, but at the same time with certain modifications, that rendered his system less extravagant than that of the

Marcionites, against whom he wrote a very learned treatise. The sum of his doctrine is as follows: "there is a Supreme God, pure and benevolent, absolutely free from all evil and imperfection; and there is also a *prince of darkness*, the fountain of all evil, disorder, and misery. The Supreme God created the world without any mixture of evil in its composition; he gave existence also to its inhabitants, who came out of his forming hand pure and incorrupt, endued with subtle, ethereal bodies, and spirits of a celestial nature. But when, in process of time, the prince of darkness had enticed men to sin, then the Supreme God permitted them to fall into sluggish and gross bodies, formed of corrupt matter by the evil principle; he permitted also the depravation and disorder which this malignant being introduced both into the natural and moral world, designing, by this permission, to punish the degeneracy and rebellion of an apostate race; and hence proceeds the perpetual conflict between reason and passion in the mind of man. It was on this account, that Jesus descended from the upper regions, clothed not with a real, but with a celestial and aerial body, and taught mankind to subdue that body of corruption which they carry about with them in this mortal life; and by *abstinence, fasting, and contemplation*, to disengage themselves from the servitude and dominion of that *malignant matter*, which chained down the soul to low and ignoble pursuits. Those, who hear the voice of this divine Instructor, and submit themselves to his discipline, shall, after the dissolution of this terrestrial body, mount up to the mansions of felicity, clothed with ethereal vehicles, or celestial bodies." Such was the doctrine of Bardesanes, who afterward abandoned the chimerical part of his system and returned to a better mind; though his sect subsisted a long time in Syria.

Tatian, by birth an Assyrian, and a disciple of Justin Martyr, is more distinguished by the ancient writers, on account of his genius and learning, and the excessive and incredible austerity of his life and manners, than by any remarkable errors or opinions which he taught his followers. It appears, however, from the testimony of credible writers, that Tatian looked upon *matter* as the fountain of all evil, and therefore recommended, in a particular manner, the mortification of the body; that he distinguished the creator of the world from the Supreme Being; denied the reality of Christ's body; and corrupted the christian religion with se-

veral other tenets of the oriental philosophy. He had a great number of followers, who were, after him, called Tatianists, but were nevertheless more frequently distinguished from other sects by the austerity of their manners. For as they rejected, with a sort of horror, all the comforts and conveniences of life, and abstained from wine with such a rigorous obstinacy as to use nothing but water even at the celebration of the Lord's supper, as they macerated their bodies by continual fastings, and lived a severe life of celibacy and abstinence, so they were called Encratites, Hydroparastates and Apotactites.

Hitherto, we have only considered the doctrine of the Asiatic gnostics. Those of the Egyptian branch differ from them in general in this, that they blended into one mass the oriental philosophy and the Egyptian theology; the former of which the Asiatics preserved unmixed in its original simplicity. The Egyptians were moreover particularly distinguished from the Asiatic gnostics, by the following difference in their religious system, viz. 1. That, though, beside the existence of a *deity* they maintained that also of an *eternal matter* endued with life and motion, yet they did not acknowledge an *eternal principle of darkness*, or the evil principle, of the Persians. 2. They supposed that our blessed Savior was a compound of two persons, of the man Jesus, and of Christ the Son of God; that the divine nature entered into the man Jesus, when he was baptized by John in the river Jordan, and departed from him when he was seized by the Jews. 3. They attributed to Christ a real, not an imaginary body; though it must be confessed, that they were much divided in their sentiments on this head. 4. Their discipline, with respect to life and manners, was much less severe than those of the Asiatic sect, and seems, in some points, to have been favorable to the corruptions and passions of men.

Basilides has generally obtained the first place among the Egyptian gnostics. "He acknowledged the existence of one Supreme God, perfect in goodness and wisdom, who produced from his own substance seven beings, or aions, of a most excellent nature. Two of these aions, called *Dynamis* and *Sophia*, i. e. *power* and *wisdom*, engendered the angels of the highest order. These angels formed a heaven for their habitation, and brought forth other angelic beings, of a nirture somewhat inferior to their own. Many other generations of angels followed these; new heavens were also crea-

ted, until the number of angelic orders and of their respective heavens, amounted to three hundred and sixty-five, and thus equaled the days of the year. All these are under the empire of an omnipotent Lord, whom Basilides called *Abraxas*." This word, which was certainly in use among the Egyptians, before his time, contains numeral letters to the amount of 365, and thereby expresses the number of heavens and angelic orders above enumerated. "The inhabitants of the lowest heavens, which touched upon the borders of the eternal, malignant, and self-animated *matter*, conceived the idea of forming a world, of that confused mass, and of creating an order of beings to people it. This design was carried into execution, and was approved by the Supreme God, who, to the animal life, with which only the inhabitants of this new world were at first endowed, added a reasonable soul, giving, at the same time, to the angels, the empire over them."

"These angelic beings, advanced to the government of the world, which they had created, fell, by degrees, from their original purity, and manifested soon the fatal marks of their depravity and corruption. They not only endeavored to efface in the minds of men the knowledge of the Supreme Being, that they might be worshiped in his stead, but also began to war against one another, with an ambitious view to enlarge every one the bounds of his respective dominion. The most arrogant and turbulent of all these angelic spirits was that which presided over the jewish nation. Hence the Supreme God, beholding with compassion the miserable state of rational beings, who groaned under the contests of these jarring powers, sent from heaven his Son Nus or Christ the chief of the aions, that, joined in a substantial union with the man Jesus, he might restore the knowledge of the Supreme God, destroy the empire of those angelic natures which presided over the world, and particularly that of the arrogant leader of the jewish people. The god of the Jews, alarmed at this, sent forth his ministers to seize the man Jesus, and put him to death. They executed his commands, but their cruelty could not extend to Christ, against whom their efforts were vain. Those souls who obey the precepts of the Son of God, shall, after the dissolution of their mortal frame, ascend to the Father, while their bodies return to the corrupt mass of matter from whence they were formed. Disobedient spirits, on the contrary, shall pass successively into other bodies."

The doctrine of Basilides, in point of morals, if we may credit the accounts of most ancient writers, was favorable to the lusts and passions of mankind, and permitted the practice of all sorts of wickedness. But those, whose testimonies are the most worthy of regard, give a quite different account of this teacher, and represent him as recommending the practice of virtue and piety in the strongest manner, and as having condemned not only the actual commission of iniquity, but even every inward propensity of the mind to a vicious conduct. It is true, there were, in his precepts relating to the conduct of life, some things which gave great offence to all true Christians. For he affirmed it to be lawful for them to conceal their religion, to deny Christ, when their lives were in danger, and to partake of the feasts of the Gentiles that were instituted in consequence of the sacrifices offered to idols. He endeavored also to diminish the glory of those who suffered martyrdom for the cause of Christ; impiously maintained, that they were more heinous sinners than others, and that their sufferings were to be looked upon as a punishment inflicted upon them by the divine justice. Though he was led into this enormous error, by an absurd notion that all the calamities of this life were of a penal nature, and that men never suffered but in consequence of their iniquities, yet this rendered his principles greatly suspected, and the irregular lives of some of his disciples seemed to justify the unfavourable opinion that was entertained concerning their master.

But whatever may be said of Basilides, it is certain, that he was far surpassed in impiety by Carpocrates, who was also of Alexandria, and who carried the gnostic blasphemies to a more enormous degree of extravagance than they had ever been brought by any of that sect. His philosophical tenets agree, in general with those of the Egyptian gnostics, He acknowledged the existence of a Supreme God, and of the *aions* derived from him by successive generations. He maintained the eternity of a *corrupt matter*, and the creation of the world from thence by angelic powers, as also the divine origin of souls unhappily imprisoned in mortal bodies, &c. But, beside these, he propagated other sentiments and maxims of a horrid kind. He asserted that Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary, according to the ordinary course of nature, and was distinguished from the rest of mankind by nothing but a superior fortitude and greatness of soul. His

doctrine also, with respect to practice, was licentious in the highest degree, for he not only allowed his disciples a full liberty to sin, but recommended to them a vicious course of life as a matter both of obligation and necessity; asserting, that eternal salvation was only attainable by those who had committed all sorts of crimes, and had daringly filled up the measure of iniquity. It is almost incredible, that one who maintained the existence of a Supreme Being, who acknowledged Christ as the Savior of mankind, could entertain such monstrous opinions as these. One would infer, indeed, from certain tenets of Carpocrates that he adopted the common doctrine of the gnostics concerning Christ, and acknowledged also the laws which this divine Savior imposed upon his disciples. But notwithstanding this, it is beyond all doubt, that the precepts and opinions of this gnostic are full of impiety; since he held, that lusts and passions, being implanted in our nature by God himself, were consequently void of guilt, and had nothing criminal in them; and that all actions were indifferent in their own nature, and were rendered good or evil only by the opinions of men, or by the laws of the state; that it was the will of God, that all things should be possessed in common, the female sex not excepted; but that human laws, by an arbitrary tyranny, branded those as robbers, and adulterers, who only used their natural rights. It is easy to perceive, that by these tenets, all the principles of virtue were destroyed, and a door opened to the most horrid licentiousness, and to the most profligate and enormous wickedness.

Valentine who was likewise an Egyptian by birth, was eminently distinguished from all his brethren by the extent of his fame, and the multitude of his followers. His sect, which took rise at Rome, grew up to a state of consistence and vigour, in the Isle of Cyprus, and spread itself through Asia, Africa and Europe, with an amazing rapidity. The principles of Valentine were, generally speaking, the same with those of the gnostics, whose name he assumed, yet in many things he entertained opinions that were particular to himself. "He placed, for instance, in the *pleroma*, so the gnostics called the habitation of the deity, thirty *aions*, of which the one half were male, and the other female. To these he added four others, which were of neither sex, viz. *Horus*, who guarded the borders of the *pleroma*, Christ, *the Holy Ghost* and Jesus. The youngest of the *aions*, called

Sophia, i. e. wisdom, conceived an ardent desire of comprehending the nature of the Supreme Being, and, by the force of this propensity, brought forth a daughter, named *Achamoth*. *Achamoth*, being exiled from the *pleroma*, fell down into the rude and undigested mass of matter, to which she gave a certain arrangement; and, by the assistance of Jesus, produced the *demiurge*, the lord and creator of all things. This *demiurge* separated the subtile or *animal* matter from that of the grosser, or more *terrestrial* kind; out of the former he created the superior world, or the visible heavens; and out of the latter he formed the inferior world, or this terraqueous globe. He also made man, in whose composition the subtile and also the grosser matter were both united, and that in equal portions; but *Achamoth*, the mother of *demiurge*, added to these two substances, of which the human race was formed, *a spiritual and celestial substance*." This is the sum of that intricate and tedious fable, that the extravagant brain of Valentine imposed upon the world for a system of religious philosophy; and from this it appears, that, though he explained the origin of the world and of the human race in a more subtle manner than the other gnostics, yet he did not differ from them in reality. His imangination was more wild and inventive than that of his brethren; and this is manifest in the whole of his doctrine, which is no more than gnosticism, set out with some supernumerary fringes, as will further appear from what follows.

"The creator of this world, according to Valentine, arrived, by degrees to that pitch of arrogance, that he either imagined himself to be God alone or, at least, was desirous that mankind should consider him as such. For this purpose, he sent forth prophets to the Jewish nation, to declare his claim to the honour that is due to the Supreme Being, and in this also the other angels that preside over the different parts of the universe immediately set themselves to imitate his ambition. To chastise this lawless arrogance of *demiurge*, and to illuminate the minds of rational beings with the knowledge of the true and Supreme deity, Christ appeared upon earth composed of an animal and spiritual substance, and clothed, moreover with an aerial body. This Redeemer, in descending upon earth, passed through the womb of Mary, as the pure water flows through the untainted conduit. Jesus, one of the supreme *aions*, was substantially united to him, when he was baptised by John in the waters of

Jordan. The creator of this world, when he perceived that the foundations of his empire were shaken by this divine man, caused him to be apprehended and nailed to the cross. But before Christ submitted to this punishment, not only Jesus the Son of God, but also the rational soul of Christ, ascended upon high, so that only the animal soul and the etherial body suffered crucifixion. Those who, abandoning the service of false deities, and the worship of the god of the Jews, live according to the precepts of Christ, and submit the animal and sensual soul to the discipline of reason, shall be truly happy; their rational and also their sensual souls shall ascend to those glorious seats of bliss which border on the *pleroma;* and when all the parts of the divine nature, or all souls are purified thoroughly and separated from *matter*, then a raging fire, let loose from its prison, shall spread its flames throughout the universe, and dissolve the frame of this corporeal world." Such is the doctrine of Valentine and the gnostics; such also are the tenets of the oriental philosophy, and they may be summed in the following propositions; *this world is a compound of good and evil. Whatever is good in it, comes down from the Supreme God the Father of lights, and to him it shall return; and then the world shall be entirely destroyed.*

We learn from ancient writers, that the sect of the Valentinians was divided into many branches. One of these was the sect of Ptolemaites, so called from their chief Ptolemy, who differed in opinion from his master Valentine, with respect both to the number and nature of the *aions*. Another of these was the sect of Secundians, whose chief Secundus, one of the principal followers of Valentine, maintained the doctrine of two eternal principles, viz. *light* and *darkness*, from whence arose the good and the evil that are observable in the universe. From the same source arose the sect of Heracleon, from whose writings Clemens and Origen have made many extracts; as also that of the Marcosians, whose leaders Marc, and Colobarsus added many absurd fictions to those of Valentine; though it is certain, at the same time, that many errors were attributed to them, which they did not maintain. I omit the mention of some other sects, which the Valentinian heresy is said to have given rise.—Whether, in reality, they all sprung from this source, is a question of a very doubtful kind, especially if we consider the errors into which the ancients have fallen, in tracing out

the origin of the various sects that divided the church.—It is not necessary to take particular notice of the more obscure and less considerable of the gnostic sects, of which the ancient writers scarcely mention any thing but the name and one or two of their distinguishing tenets. Such were the Adamites, who are said to have professed an exact imitation of the primitive state of innocence; the Cainites, who treated as saints, with the utmost marks of admiration and respect, Cain, Korah, Dathan, the inhabitants of Sodom and even the traitor Judas. Such also were the Abelites, who entered into the bonds of matrimony, but neglected to fulfil its principal end, even the procreation of offspring; the Sethites, who honored Seth in a particular manner, and looked upon him as the same person with Christ; the Florinians, who had Florinus and Blastus for their chiefs, and several others. It is highly probable, that the ancient teachers, deceived by the variety of names that distinguished the heretics, may with too much precipitation have divided one sect into many; nay, it may be further questioned, whether they have, at all times, represented accurately the nature and true meaning of several opinions concerning which they have written.

The Ophites, or Serpentinians, a ridiculous sort of heretics, who had for their leader a man called Euphrates, deserve not the lowest place among the Egyptian gnostics.—This sect, which had its origin among the Jews, was of a more ancient date than the christian religion. A part of its followers embraced the gospel, while the other retained their primitive superstition, and from hence arose the division of the Ophites into christian and antichristian. The christian Ophites entertained almost the same fantastic opinions that were held by the other Egyptian gnostics, concerning the *aions*, the *eternal matter*, the *creation of the world* in opposition to the will of God, the *rulers of the seven planets* that presided over this world, the *tyranny of demiurge*, and also concerning Christ united to the man Jesus, in order to destroy the empire of this usurper. But beside these, they received the name of Ophites, viz. "that the *serpent*, by which our first parents were deceived, was either Christ himself, or *Sophia*, concealed under the form of that animal;" and in consequence of this opinion, they are said to have nourished a certain number of serpents, which they looked upon as sacred, and to which they offered a sort of

worship, a subordinate kind of divine honors. It was no difficult matter for those, who made a distinction between the Supreme Being and the creator of the world, and who looked upon everything as divine, which was in opposition to *demiurge*, to fall into these extravagant notions.

The schisms and commotions that arose in the church, from a mixture of the oriental and Egyptian philosophy with the christian religion, were in the second century, increased by those Grecian philosophers who embraced the doctrine of Christ The christian doctrine, concerning the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*, and the *two natures* united in our blesssed Savior, were, by no means, reconcileable with the tenets of the sages and teachers of Greece, who therefore endeavored to explain them in such a manner as to render them comprehensible. Praxeas, a man of genius and learning began to propagate these explications at Rome, and was severely persecuted for the errors they contained. He denied any *real* distinction between the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*, and maintained that the *Father*, sole creator of all things, had united to himself the *human nature* of Christ. Hence his followers were called Monarchians, because of their denying a plurality of persons in the Deity; and also Patropassians, because, according to Tertullian's account, they believed that the Father was so intimately united with the man Christ, his Son, that he suffered with him the anguish of an afflicted life, and the torments of an ignominious death. However ready many may have been to embrace this erroneous doctrine, it does not appear that this sect formed themselves a separate place of worship, or removed themselves from the ordinary assemblies of Christians.

An opinion highly resembling that now mentioned was, about the same time, professed at Rome by Theodotus, who, though a tanner, was a man of profound learning, and also Artemas, or Artemon, from whom the sect of the Artemonites derive their origin. The accounts given of these two persons, by the ancient writers, are not only few in number, but are also extremely ambiguous and obscure. Their sentiments however, as far as they can be collected from the best records, amount to this: "that, at the birth of the man Christ, a certain *divine energy*, or portion of the divine nature, and not the *person* of the Father, as Praxeas imagined, united itself to him."

It is impossible to decide with any degree of certainty

which of the two was the most ancient, Theodotus, or Artemon, as also whether they both taught the same doctrine, or differed in their opinions. One thing, indeed, is certain, and that is, that the disciples of both applied the dictates of philosophy, and even the science of geometry, to the explication of the christian doctrine.

A like attachment to the dictates of a presumptuous philosophy, induced Hermogenes, a painter by profession, to abandon the doctrine of christianity, concerning the origin of the world and the nature of the soul, and thus to raise new troubles in the church. Regarding *matter* as the fountain of all evil, he could not persuade himself that God had created it from nothing, by an almighty act of his will; and therefore he maintained that the world, with whatever it contains, as also the souls of men, and other spirits, were formed by the Deity from an uncreated and eternal mass of corrupt *matter*. In this doctrine there many intricate things, and it manifestly jarred with the opinions commonly received among Christians, relative to that difficult and almost unsearchable subject. How Hermogenes explained those doctrines of christianity which opposed his system, neither Tertullian, who refuted it, nor any of the ancient writers inform us.

These sects, which we have now been passing in review, may be justly regarded as the offspring of philosophy. But they were succeeded by one in which ignorance reigned, and which was the mortal enemy of philosophy and letters. It was formed by Montanus, an obscure man, without any capacity, who lived in a Phrygian village called Pepuza. This weak man was foolish and extravagant enough to take it into his head that he was the *paraclete*, or comforter, which the divine Savior, at his departure from the earth, promised to send to his disciples, to lead them to all truth. He made no attempts upon the peculiar doctrines of christianity; but only declared that he was sent with a divine commission, to give to the moral precepts delivered by Christ and his apostles the finishing *touch* that was to bring them to perfection.

He was of opinion that Christ and his apostles made, in their precepts, many allowances for the infirmities of those among whom they lived, and that this condescending indulgence rendered their system of moral laws imperfect and incomplete. He therefore added to the laws of the gospel many austere decisions; inculcated the necessity of multiplying

fasts; prohibited second marriages as unlawful; maintained that the church should refuse absolution to to those who had fallen into the commission of enormous sins; and condemned all care of the body, especially all nicety in dress; and all female ornaments. The excessive austerity of this ignorant fanatic did not stop here; he showed the same aversion to the noblest employments of the mind, that he did to the innocent enjoyments of life; and gave it as his opinion, that philosophy, arts, and whatever savored of polite literature, should be mercilessly banished from the christian church. He looked upon those christians as guilty of a most heinous transgression who saved their lives by flight, from the persecuting sword, or who ransomed them by money, from the hands of their cruel and mercenary judges. I might mention many other precepts of the same teacher, equal to these in severity and rigor.

It was impossible to suffer, within the bounds of the church, an enthusiast, who gave himself out for a teacher, whose tenets were superior in sanctity to those of Christ himself, and who imposed his austere discipline upon Christians as enjoined by a divine authority, and dictated by the oracle of celestial wisdom, which spoke to the world through him. Beside, his dismal predictions concerning the disasters that were to happen in the empire, and the approaching destruction of the Roman republic, were every way proper to render him obnoxious to the governing powers, and also to excite their resentment against the church which nourished such an inauspicious prophet in its bosom. Montanus, therefore, first by a decree of certain assemblies, and afterward by the unanimous voice of the whole church, was solemnly separated from the body of the faithful. It is, however, certain, that the very severity of his doctrines gained him the esteem and confidence of many, who were far from being of the lowest order. The most eminent among these were Priscilla and Maximilla, and ladies more remarkable for their opulence than for their virtue, and who fell with a high degree of warmth and zeal into the visions of their fanatical chief, prophesied like him, and imitated the pretended paraclete in all the variety of his extravagance and folly. Hence it became an easy matter for Montanus to erect a new church, which was also, in effect, first established at Pepuza, a town in Phrygia, and afterward spread abroad through Asia, Africa, and a part of Europe. The most emi-

nent and learned of all the followers of this rigid enthusiast was Tertullian, a man of great learning and genius, but of an austere and melancholy natural temper. This great man by adopting the sentiments of Montanus, and maintaining his cause with fortitude, and even vehemence, in a multitude of books written upon that occasion, has shown to the world a mortifying spectacle of the deviations of which human nature is capable, even in those in whom it seems to have approached the nearest to perfection.

THE THIRD CENTURY.*

PART I.

EXTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH CONTAINS THE PROSPEROUS EVENTS THAT HAPPENED TO THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

The privileges of the Christians increased—kindness of the emperor Alexander towards the Christians—other emperors favorable—number of Christians increased—the causes—countries that received the gospel—Gauls and Germans.

That the Christians suffered in this century calamities and injuries of the most dreadful kind, is a matter that admits of no debate; nor was there, indeed, any period in which they were not exposed to perpetual dangers. For, not to mention the fury of the people, set in motion so often by the craft and zeal of their licentious priests, the evil came from a higher source; the prætors and magistrates, notwithstanding the ancient laws of the emperors, in favor of the Christians, had it in their power to pursue them with all sorts of vexations, as often as avarice, cruelty, or superstition roused up the infernal spirit of persecution in their breasts. At the same time it is certain that the rights and privileges of the Christians were multiplied in this century, much more than many are apt to imagine. In the army, at court, and indeed in all the orders of the nation, there was a considerable number of Christians who lived entirely unmolested; and, what is still more, the profession of christianity was no obstacle to public preferment under most of the emperors that reigned in this century. It is also certain, that the Christians had, in many places, houses where they assembled for the pur-

*In my prospectus two hundred pages were promised. My first calculation falling short of the proposed number, another century is appended, to make up the compliment.—S. K. H.

poses of divine worship, and that with the knowledge and connivance of the emperors and magistrates. And though it be more than probable that this liberty was, upon many occasions, and even for the most part, purchased at a high rate, yet it is manifest, that some of the emperors were very favorably inclined toward the Christians, and were far from having an aversion to their religion.

Caracalla, the son of Severus, was proclaimed emperor, in the year 211, and during the six years of his government he neither oppressed the Christians himself nor permitted any others to treat them with cruelty or injustice. Heliogabulus also, though in other respects the most infamous of all princes, and perhaps the most odious of all mortals, showed no marks of bitterness or aversion toward the disciples of Jesus. His successor, Alexander Severus, who was a prince distinguished by a noble assemblage of the most excellent, and illustrious virtues, did not, indeed, abrogate the laws that had been enacted against the Christians; and this is the reason why we have some examples of martyrdom under his administration. It is nevertheless certain, that he showed them, in many ways, and upon every occasion that was offered him, the most undoubted marks of benignity of favor; nay he is said to have gone so far as to pay a certain sort of worship to the Divine Author of our religion. This his favorable inclination toward the Christians, was probably owing at first to the instructions and counsels of his mother Julia Mammæa, for whom he had a high degree of love and veneration. Julia had a very favorable sentiment of the Christian religion; and, being once at Antioch, sent for the famous Origen at Alexandria, in order to enjoy the pleasure and advantage of his conversation and instructions. Those who assert that Julia, and her son Alexander, embraced the christian religion, are by no means furnished with unexceptionable testimonies to confirm this fact; though we may affirm with confidence, that this virtuous prince looked upon christianity as meriting, beyond all other religions, toleration and favor from the state, and considered its Author as worthy of a place among those who have been distinguished by their sublime virtues, and honored with a commission from above.

Under Gordian the Christians lived in tranquillity. His successors the Philips, father and son, proved so favorable and even friendly to them, that these two emperors passed,

in the opinion of many, for Christians; and, indeed the arguments alleged to prove that they embraced, though in a secret and clandestine manner, the religion of Jesus, seem to have a high degree of weight, and render this fact extremely probable. But as these arguments are opposed by others equally specious, that famous question, relating to the religion of Philip the Arabian, and his son, must be left undecided. Neither side offer reasons so victorious and unanswerable, as to produce a full and complete conviction; and this is therefore one of those many cases, where a suspension of judgment is both allowable and wise. With respect to Gallienus, and some other emperors of this century, if they did not professedly favor the progress of christianity, yet neither did they oppress its followers, nor retard its advancement.

This clemency and benevolence, which the followers of Jesus experienced from great men, and especially, from those of imperial dignity, must be placed, without doubt, among those human means that contributed to multiply the number of Christians, and to enlarge the bounds of the church. Other causes, however, both *divine* and *human*, must be added here, to render a complete and satisfactory account of this matter. Among the causes which belong to the first of these classes, we do not only reckon the intrinsic force of celestial truth, and the piety and fortitude of those who declared it to the world, but also that *especial* and *interposing Providence*, which by dreams and visions, presented to the minds of many, who were either inattentive to the christian doctrine, or its professed enemies, touched their hearts with a conviction of the truth and a sense of its importance, and engaged them, without delay, to profess themselves the disciples of Christ. To this may also be added, the healing of diseases, and other miracles, which many Christians were yet enabled to perform by invoking the name of the divine Savior. The number of miracles was however, much less in this than the preceding century; nor must this alteration be attributed only to the divine wisdom, which rendered miraculous interposition less frequent in proportion as they became less necessary; but also to his justice, which was provoked to diminish the frequency of gifts, which some did not scruple to pevert to mercenary purposes.

If we turn our view to the human means that contributed, at this time, to multiply the numbers of Christians, and to

extend the limits of the church, we shall find a great variety of causes uniting their influence, and contributing jointly to this happy purpose. Among these must be reckoned the translations of the sacred writings into various languages, the zeal and labors of Origen in spreading abroad copies of them everywhere, and the different works that were published, by learned, and pious men, in defence of the gospel. We may add also to this, that the acts of beneficence and liberality, performed by the Christians, even toward those whose religious principles they abhorred, had a great influence in attracting the esteem, and removing the prejudices of many, who were thus prepared for examining with candor, the christian doctrine, and consequently for receiving its divine light. The worshippers of the pagan deities must have been destitute of every generous affection, of every humane feeling, if the view of that boundless charity, which the Christains exercised toward the poor, the love they expressed even to their enemies, the tender care they took of the sick and infirm, the humanity they discovered in the redemption of captives, and the other illustrious virtues, which rendered them so worthy of universal esteem, had not touched there hearts, dispelled their prepossessions, and rendered them more favourable to the disciples of Jesus. If, among the causes of the propagation of Christianity, there is any place due to *pious frauds*, it is certain, that they merit a very small part of the honor of having contributed to this glorious purpose, since they were practised by few, and that very seldom.

That the limits of the church were extended in this century, is a matter beyond all controversy. It is not, however, equally certain in what manner, by what persons, or in what parts of the world, this was effected. Origen, invited from Alexandria by an Arabian prince, converted, by his assiduous labors, a certain tribe of wandering Arabs to the Christian faith. The Goths, a fierce and warlike people, who inhabited the countries of Mysia and Thrace, and who accustomed to rapine, vexed the neighboring provinces by perpetual incursions, received the knowledge of the gospel by the means of certain christain teachers sent thither from Asia. The holy lives of these venerable teachers, and the miraculous powers with which they were endowed, attracted the esteem, even of a people educated to nothing but plunder and devastation, and absolutely uncivilized by letters or science; and their authority and influence grew so great, and

produced, in process of time, such remarkable effects, that a great part of this barberous people became the disciples of Christ, and put off, in a manner, that ferocity that was become so natural to them.

The christian assemblies, founded in Gaul by the Asiatic teachers in the preceding contury, were few in number, and of very little extent; but both their number and extent were considerably increased from the time of the emperor Decius. Under his reign Dionysius, Gatian, Trophymus, Paul, Saturninus, Martial, Stremonius, men of exemplary piety, passed into this province, and amidst dangers and trials of various kinds, erected churches at Paris, Tours, Arles, and several other places. This was followed by a rapid progress of the gospel among the Gauls, as the disciples of these pious teachers spread, in a short time, the knowledge of christianity through the whole country. We must also place in this century the origin of several German churches, such as those of Cologn; Treves, Metz, and others, of which Eucharius, Valerius, Maternus, and Clemens, were the principal founders. The historians of Scotland inform us, that the light of christianity arose upon that country during this century; but though there be nothing improbable in this assertion, yet it is not built upon incontestible authority.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE CALAMITOUS EVENTS WHICH HAPPENED TO THE CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY.

Persecutions—many Christians chargeable with defection—produces warm discussions—persecutions continue—attempts of philosophers against christianity—comparisons drawn between philosophers and Christ—state of learning among the Christians.

In the beginning of this century, the christian church suffered calamities of various kinds throughout the provinces in the Roman empire. These sufferings incrased in a terrible manner, in consequence of a law made, id the year 203, by the emperor Severus, who, in other respects, was certainly no enemy to the Christians, by which every subject of the empire was prohibited to change the religion of his ancestors for that of Christian or Jewish. This law was, in its effects,

most prejudicial to the Christians; for, though it did not formally condemn them, and seemed only adapted to put a stop to the further progress of the gospel, yet it induced rapacious and unjust magistrates to persecute even unto death the poorer sort among the Christians, that thus the richer might be led, through fear of like treatment, to purchase their tranquillity and safety at an expensive rate. Hence many of the disciples of Christ, both in Egypt, and also in several parts of Asia and Africa, were put to death in consequence of this law. Among these Leonidas, the father of Origen, Perpetua and Felicitas, those two famous African ladies, whose *acts* have come down to our times, Potamiena Marcella, and other martyrs of both sexes, acquired an illustrious name by the magnanimity and tranquillity with which they endured the most cruel sufferings.

From the death of Severus to the reign of Maximin, the condition of the Christians was, in some places, prosperous, and in all, supportable. But with Maximin the face of affairs changed. This unworthy emperor having animated the Roman soldiers to assassinate Alexander Severus dreaded the resentment of the Christians, whom that excellent prince had favored and protected in a distinguished manner; and for this reason, he ordered the bishops, whom he knew that Alexander had always treated as his intimate friends, to be seized and put to death. During his reign, the Christians suffered in the most barbarous manner; for, though the edict of this tyrant extended only to the bishops and leaders of the christian church, yet its shocking effects reached much further; as it animated the heathen priests, the magistrates and the multitude, against Christians of every rank and order.

This storm was succeeded by a calm; in which the Christians enjoyed a happy tranquillity for many years. The accession of Decius Trajan to the imperial throne, in the year 249, raised a tempest, in which the fury of persecution fell in a dreadful manner upon the church of Christ. For this emperor, either from an ill-grounded fear of the Christians, or from a violent zeal for the superstition of his ancestors, published most terrible and cruel edicts; by which the pretors were ordered, upon pain of death, either to extirpate the whole body of Christians without exception, or to force them, by torments of various kinds, to return to pagan worship. Hence, in all the provinces of the empire, multi-

tudes of Christians were, during the space of two years, put to death by the most horrid punishments, which an ingenious barbarity could invent. The most unhappy circumstance of all these cruelties was, their fatal influence upon the faith and constancy of many of the sufferers; for as this persecution was much more terrible than all those that preceded it, so a great number of Christians, dismayed, not at the approach of death, but at the aspect of those dreadful and lingering torments, which a barbarous magistracy had prepared to combat their constancy, fell from the profession of their faith, and secured themselves from punishment, either by *offering sacrifices*, or by *burning incense*, before the images of the gods, or by purchasing *certificates* from the pagan priests. Hence arose the opprobrious names of Sacrificati, given to those who *sacrificed;* Thurificati, to those who *burned incense;* and Libellatici, to those who *produced certificates*.

This defection of such a prodigious number of christians under Decius was the occasion of great commotions in the church, and produced debates of a very difficult nature. For the *lapsed*, or those that had fallen from their christian profession, were desirous to be restored to church communion without submitting to that painful course of *penitential* discipline, which the ecclesiastical laws indispensably required. The bishops were divided upon this matter; some were for showing the desired indulgence, while others opposed it with all their might. In Egypt and Africa, many, in order to obtain more speedily the pardon of their apostacy, interested the *martyrs* in their behalf, and received from them *letters of reconciliation and peace*, i. e. a formal act by which they, the martyrs, declared, in their last moments, that they looked upon them as worthy of their communion, and desired of consequence that they should be restored to their place among the brethren. Some bishops and presbyters readmitted into the church with too much facility, apostates and transgressors, who produced such testimonies as these. But Cyprian, bishop of Carthge, a man of severe wisdom and great dignity of character, acted in quite another way. Though he had no intention to derogate from the authority of the venerable martyrs, yet he opposed with vigor this unreasonable lenity, and set limits to the efficacy of these letters of reconciliation and peace. Hence arose a keen dispute between him and the martyrs, confessors, presbyters, and lapsed, seconded

by the people; and yet, notwithstanding this formidable multitude of adversaries, the venerable bishop came off victorious.

Gallus, the successor of Decius, and Volusianus, son of the former, reanimated the flame of persecution, which was beginning to burn with less fury. And, beside the sufferings which the Christians had to undergo in cosequence of their cruel edicts, they were also involved in the public calamities that prevailed at this time, and suffered grievously from a terrible pestilence which spread desolation through many provinces of the empire. This pestilence also was an occasion which the pagan priests used with dexterity to renew the rage of persecution against them, by persuading the people that it was on account of the lenity used towards the Christians, that the gods sent down their judgment upon the nation. In the year 254, Valerian being declared emperor, made the fury of persecution cease, and restored the church to a state of tranquillity.

The clemency and benevolence which Valerian showed to the Christians, continued until the fifth year of his reign.—Then the scene began to change, and the change indeed was sudden. Macrianus, a superstitious and cruel bigot to paganism, had gained an ascendant over Valerian, and was his chief counsellor in every thing that related to the administration of the government. By the persuasion of this imperious minister, the Christians were prohibited to assemble themselves together, and their bishops and teachers were sent into banishment. This edict was published in the year 257, and was followed, the year after, by one still more severe; in consequence of which a considerable number of Christians, in all the different provinces of the empire, were put to death, and that by such cruel methods of execution, as were much more terrible than death itself. Of those that suffered in this persecution, the most eminent were Cyprian, bishop of Charthage; Sixtus, bishop of Rome; and Laurentius, a Roman deacon, who was barbarously consumed by a slow and lingering fire. An unexpected event suspended, for a while, the sufferings of the Christians. Valerian was made prisoner in the war against the Persians; and his son Gallienus, in the year 260, restored peace to the church.

The condition of the Christians was rather supportable than happy, under the reign of Gallienus, which lasted eight years; as also under the short administration of his successors Clau-

dius. Nor did they suffer much during the first four years of the reign of Aurelian, who was raised to the empire in the year 270. But the fifth year of this emperor's administration would have proved fatal to them, had not his violent death prevented the execution of his cruel purposes. For while, set on by the unjust suggestions of his own superstition or by the barbarous counsels of a bigoted priesthood, he was preparing a formidable attack upon the Christians, he was obliged to march into Gaul, where he was murdered, in the year 275, before his edicts were published throughout the empire. Few therefore suffered martyrdom under his reign, and indeed, during the remainder of this century, the Christians enjoyed a considerable measure of ease and tranquillity. They were, at least, free from any violent attacks of oppression and injustice, except in a small number of cases, where the avarice and superstition of the Roman magistrates interrupted their tranquillity.

While the Roman emperors and proconsuls employed against the Christians the terror of unrighteous edicts, and the edge of the destroying sword, the platonic philosophers, who have been described above, exhausted against christianity all the resources of their art and dexterity, in rhetorical declamaiions, subtile writings, and ingenious stratagems. These artful adversaries were so much the more dangerous and formidable, as they had adopted several of the doctrines and institutions of the gospel, and with a specious air of moderation and impartiality, were attempting, after the example of their master Ammonius, to reconcile paganism with christianity, and to form a sort of coalition of the ancient and the new religion. These philosophers had at their head, in this century, Porphyry, a Syrian, or, as some allege, a Tyrian, by birth, who wrote against the Christians a long and laborious work, which was destroyed afterward by an imperial edict. He was, undoubtedly, a writer of great dexterity, genius and erudition, as those of his works that yet remain sufficiently testify. But those very works, and the history of his life, show us, at the same time, that he was a much more virulent, than a formidable enemy to the Christians. For by them it appears, that he was much more attentive to the suggestions of a superstitious spirit and the visions of a lively fancy, than to the sober dictates of right reason and a sound judgment. And it may be more especially observed of the fragments that yet remain

of his work against the Christians, that they are equally destitute of judgment and equity, and are utterly unworthy of a wise and a good man.

Many were the deceitful and perfidious stratagems by which this sect endeavored to obscure the lustre, and to diminish the authority of the christian doctrine. But none of these were more dangerous than the seducing artifice with which they formed a comparison between the life, actions and miracles of Christ, and the history of the ancient philosophers; and placed the contending parties in such fallacious points of view, as to make the pretended sages of antiquity appear in nothing inferior to the divine Savior. With this view, Architas of Tarentum, Appollonius Tyanæus, a Pythagorean philosopher, whose miracles and perigrinations were highly celebrated by the vulgar, were brought upon the scene, and exhibited as divine teachers and rivals of the glory of the Son of God. Philostratus, one of the most eminent rhetoricians of this age, composed a history of the life of Appollonius, who was little else than a cunning knave, and did nothing but ape the austerity and sanctity of Pythagoras. This history appears manifestly designed to draw a parallel between Christ and the philosopher of Tyana; but the impudent fictions, and the ridiculous fables, with which this work is filled, must, one would think, have rendered it incapable of deceiving any who were possessed of a sound mind; any, but such as, through the corruption of vicious prejudices were willing to be deceived.

But as there are no opinions, however absurd, and no stories, however idle and improbable, that a weak and ignorant multitude, who are more attentive to the pomp of *words*, than to the truth of *things*, will not easily swallow; so it happened, that many were ensnared by the absurd attempts of these insidious philosophers. Some were induced by these perfidious stratagems to abandon the christian religion, which they had embraced. Others, when they heard that true christianity, as it was taught by Jesns, and not as it was afterwards corrupted by his disciples, differed almost in nothing from the pagan religion properly explained and restored to its primitive purity, determined to remain in the religion of their ancestors, and in the worship of their gods. A third sort were led, by these comparisons between Christ and the ancient philosophers, to form to themselves a motley system of religion composed of the tenets of both par-

ties, whom they treated with the same veneration and respect. Such was, particularly the method of Alexander Severus, who paid indiscriminately divine honors to Christ, and to Orpheus, to Apollonius, and the other philosophers and the heroes whose names were famous in ancient times.

The credit and power of the Jews were now too much diminished to render them as capable of injuring the Christians, by their influence upon the magistrates, as they had formerly been. This did not, however, discourage their malicious efforts, as the books which Tertullian and Cyprian have written against them abundantly show, with several other writings of the christian teachers, who complained of the malignity of the Jews, and of their perfidious stratagems. During the persecution under Severus, a certain person called Domninus, who had embraced christianity, deserted to the Jews, doubtless, to avoid the punishments that were decreed against the Christians; and it was to recall this apostate to his duty and his profession, that Serapion, bishop of Antioch, wrote a particular treatise against the Jews. We may, however, conclude from this instance, that when the Christians were persecuted, the Jews were treated with less severity and contempt, on account of their enmity against the disciples of Jesus. And from the same fact we may also learn, that, though they were in a state of great subjection and abasement, yet they were not entirely deprived of all power of oppressing the Christians.

PART II.

INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THE STATE OF LETTERS AND PHILOSOPHY DURING THIS CENTURY.

Decay of learning—state of philosophy—Plotinus,—his doctrine widely propagated—different sects of this philosophy—state of learning among the Christians.

The arts and sciences, which in the preceding century, were in a declining state, seemed in this ready to expire, and had now lost all their vigour, and all their lustre.—The celebrated rhetorician Longinus, and the eminent hisrorian Dion Cassius; with a few others, were the last among the Greeks, who stood in the breach against the prevailing ignorance and barbarianism of the times. Men of learning and genius were less numerous still in the western provinces of the empire, though there were, in several places, flourishing schools erected for the advancement of the sciences, and the culture of taste and genius. Different reasons contributed to this decay of learning. Few of the emperors patronized the sciences, or encouraged, by the prospect of their favor and protection, that emulation, which is the soul of the republic of letters. Beside, the civil wars that almost always distracted the empire, were extremely unfavorable to the pursuit of science, and the perpetual incursions of the barbarous nations interrupted that leisure and tranquil ity which are so essential to the progress of learning and knowledge, and extinguished, among a people accustomed to nothing almost but the din of arms, all desire of literary acquisitions.

If we turn our eyes toward the state of philosophy, the prospect will appear somewhat less desolate and comfortless. There were, as yet, in several of the Grecian sects, men of considerable knowledge and reputation, of whom Longinus

has mentioned the greatest part. But all these sects were gradually eclipsed by the school of Ammonius, whose origin and doctrines have been considered above. This victorious sect, which was formed in Egypt, issued forth from thence with such a rapid progress, that in a short time, it extended itself almost throughout the Roman empire, and drew into its *vortex*, the greatest part of those who applied themselves, through inclination, to the study of philosophy. This amazing progress was due to Plotinus, the most eminent disciple of Ammonius, a man of a most subtile invention, and endowed by nature with a genius capable of the most profound researches, and equal to this investigation of the most abtruse and difficult subjects. This penetrating and sublime philosopher taught publicly first in Persia, and afterward at Rome, and in Campania; in all which places the youth flocked in crowds to receive his instruction. He comprehended the precepts of his philosophy, in several books the most of which are yet extant.

The number of disciples that were formed in the school of Plotinus, is almost beyond credibility. The most famous of them was Porphyry, who spread abroad through Sicily and many other countries, the doctrine of his master, revised with great accuracy, adorned with the graces of a flowing and elegant style, and enriched with new inventions and curious improvements. From the time of Ammonius, until the sixth century, this was almost the only system of philosophy that was publicly taught at Alexandria. A certain philosopher, whose name was Plutarch, having learned it there, brought it into Greece, and renewed, at Athens, the celebrated *academy*, from whence issued a set of illustrious philosophers; whom we shall have occasion to mention in the progress of this work.

We have unfolded above the nature and doctrines of this philosophy, as far as was compatible with the brevity of our present design. It is, however, proper to add here, that its votaries were not all of the same sentiments, but thought very differently upon a variety of subjects. This difference of opinion was the natural consequence of that fundamental law; which the whole sect was obliged to keep constantly in view, viz. *that truth was to be pursued with the utmost liberty, and to be collected from all the different systems in which it lay dispersed.* Hence it happened, that the Athenians, rejected certain opinions that were entertained by the philosophers of

Alexandria. None, however, who were ambitious to be ranked among these new Platonists, called in question the main doctrines, which formed the groundwork of their singular system; those, for example, which regarded the *existence of one God;* the *fountain of all things*; the *eternity of the world* the *dependence of matter upon the Supreme Being;* the *nature of souls:* the *plurality of gods;* the *method of interpreting the popular superstitions, &c.*

The famous questions concerning the excellence and utility of human learning, was now debated with great warmth among the Christians, and the contending parties. in this controversy, seemed hitherto of equal force in point of numbers, or nearly so. Many recommended the study of philosophy, and an acquaintance with the Greek and Roman literature; while others maintained, that these were pernicious to the interests of genuine christianity, and the progress of true piety. The cause of letters and philosophy triumphed, however by degrees; and those who wished well to them, gained ground more and more, till at length the superiority was manifestly decided in their favor. This victory was principally due to the influence and authority of Origen, who having been early instructed in the new kind of platonism already metioned, blended it unhappily with the pure and more sublime tenets of a celestial doctrine, and recommended it, in the warmest manner, to the youth who attended his public lessons. The fame of this philosopher increased daily among the Christians; and, in proportion to his rising credit, his method of proposing and explaining the doctrines of christianity gained authority, till it became almost universal. Beside, some of the disciples of Plotinus having embraced christianity, on condition that they should be allowed to retain such of the opinions of their master as they thought of superior excellence and merit, this must also have contributed, in some measure, to turn the balance in favor of the sciences. These christian philosophers preserving still a fervent zeal for the doctrines of their heathen chief, would naturally embrace every opportunity of spreading them abroad, and instilling them into the minds of the ignorant and the unwary.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE TEACHERS AND MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH, AND ITS FORM OF GOVERNMENT, DURING THIS CENTURY.

The form of Church government—the Bishop of Rome—church government degenerates into a monarchial form—vices of the clergy—the less orders—mariage of the clergy—principal writers.

The form of church government that had been adopted by Christians in general, had now acquired greater degrees of stability and force, both in particular churches, and in the universal society of Christians collectively considered. It appears incontestable from the most authentic records, and the best histories of this century, that in the larger cities, there was, at the head of each church, a person to whom was given the title of *bishop* who ruled this sacred community with a certain sort of authority, in concert, however, with the body of *presbyters*, and consulting, in matters of moment, the opinion and voices of the whole assembly. It is also equally evident, that, in every province, *one* bishop was invested with a certain superiority over the rest, in point of rank and authority, This was necessary to the maintenance of that *association* of churches that had been introduced in the preceding century; and contributed, moreover, to facilitate the holding of *general councils*, and to give a certain degree of order and consistence to their proceedings. It must at the same time, be carefully observed, that the rights and privileges of these *primitive bishops*, were not, every where, accurately fixed, nor determined in such a manner as to prevent encroachments and disputes; nor does it appear, that the chief authority, in the province, was always conferred upon that bishop who presided over the church established in the metropolis. It is further to be noticed, as a matter beyond all dispute, that the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria, considered as rulers of primitive and apostolic churches, had a kind of pre-eminence over all others, and were not only consulted frequently in affairs of a difficult and momentous nature, but were also distinguished by peculiar rights and privileges.

With respect, particularly, to the bishop of Rome, he is supposed by Cyprian to have had, at this time, a certain pre-eminence in the church; nor does he stand alone in this

opinion. But it is to be carefully observed, that even those who, with Cyprian, attributed this pre-eminence to the Roman prelate insisted, at the same time, with the utmost warmth, upon the *equality*, in point of *dignity* and *authority*, that subsisted among all the members of the episcopal order. In consequence of this opinion of an *equality* among all christian bishops, they rejected, with contempt, the judgment of the *bishop of Rome*, when they thought it ill founded or unjust, and followed their own sense of things with a perfect independence. Of this Cyprian himself gave an eminent example, in his famous controversy with Stephen bishop of Rome, concerning the *baptism of heretics*, in which he treated the arrogance of that imperious prelate with a noble indignation, and also with a perfect contempt. Whoever, therefore; compares all these things together, will easily perceive, that the *pre-eminence* of the bishop of Rome, was a pre-eminence of *order* and *association*, and not of *power* and *authority*. Or, to explain the matter yet more clearly, the pre-eminence of the bishop of Rome, in the universal church, was such as that of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was in the African churches. And every one knows, that the precedence of this latter prelate diminished in nothing the equality that subsisted among all African bishops, invalidated in no instance their rights and liberties; but gave only to Cyprian, as the president of their general assemblies, a power of calling councils, of presiding in them, of admonishing his brethren in a mild and fraternal manner, and of executing, in short, such offices as the *order* and purposes of these ecclesiastical meetings necessarily required.

The face of things began now to change in the christian church. The ancient method of church government seemed, in general; still to subsist, while, at the same time, by imperceptible steps, it varied from the primitive rule, and degenerated toward the form of a religious monarchy. For the bishops aspired to higher degrees of power and authority than they had formerly possessed; and not only violated the rights of the people, but also made gradual encroachments upon ihe privileges of the presbyters. And that they might cover these usurpations with an air of justice, and an appearance of reason, they published new doctrines concerning the nature of the church, and of the episcopal dignity which, however, were in general so obscure, that they themselves seem to have understood them as little as those to

whom they were delivered. One of the principal authors of this government of the church, was Cyprian, who pleaded for the power of the bishops with more zeal and vehemence than had ever been hitherto employed in that cause, though not with an unshaken constancy and perseverance; for, in difficult and perilous times, necessity sometimes obliged him to yield, and submit several things to the judgment and authority of the church.

This change, in the form of church government, was soon followed by a train of vices, which dishonored the character and authority of those to whom the administration of the church was committed. For, though several yet continued to exhibit to the world illustrious examples of primitive piety aud christian virtue, yet many were sunk in luxury and voluptuousness, puffed up with vanity, arrogance, and ambition, possessed with a spirit of contention and discord, and and addicted to many other vices that cast on undeserved reproach upon the holy religion, of which they were the unworthy professors and ministers. This is testified in such an ample manner, by the repeated complaints of many of the most respectable writers of this age, that truth will not permit us to spread the veil, which we should otherwise be desirous to cast over such enormities among an order so sacred. The *bishops* assumed, in many places, a princely authority, particularly to those whe had the greatest number of churches under their inspection, and who presided over the most opulent assemblies. They appropriated to their evangelic function the splendid ensigns of temporal majesty. A throne, surrounded with ministers, exalted above his equals the servant of the meek and humble Jesus; and sumptuous garments dazzled the eyes and the minds of the multitude into an ignorant veneration for their arrogated authority. The example of the bishops was ambitiously initiated by the *presbyters*, who neglected the sacred duties of their station, abandoned themselves to the indolence and delicacy of an effeminate and luxurious life. The *deacons*, beholding the presbyters deserting thus their functions, boldly usurped their rights and privileges; and the effects of a corrupt ambition were spread through every rank of the sacred order.

From what has been now observed, we may come, perhaps, at the true origin of *minor* or lesser *orders*, which were, in this century, added every where to those of the *bishops pres-*

byters and *deacons*. For, certainly, the titles and offices of *subdeacons*, *acolyuhi*, *ostiarii*, or doorkeepers, *readers*, *exorcists*, *copiatæ*, would never have been heard of in the church, if its rulers had been assiduously and zealously employed in promoting the interests of truth and piety by their labors and their example. But when the honors and privileges of the bishops and presbyters were augmented, the *deacons* also began to extend their ambitious views, and to dispise those lower functions and employments which they had hitherto exercised with such humility and zeal. The additional orders that were now created to diminish the labors of the present rulers of the church, had functions allotted to them, which their names partly explain. The institution of *exorcists* was a consequence of the doctrine of the new platonists, which the Christians adopted, and which taught that the evil *genii*, or spirits, were continually hovering over human bodies, toward which they were carried by a natural and vehement desire; and that vicious men were not so much impelled to sin by an innate depravity, or by the seduction of example, as by the internal suggestions of some evil demon. The *copiatæ* were employed in providing for the decent interment of the dead.

Marriage was permitted to all the various ranks and orders of the clergy, high and low. Those, however, who continued in a state of celibacy, obtained by this abstinence a higher reputation of sanctity and virtue than others. This was owing to an almost general persuasion, that they, who took wives, were of all others the most subject to the influence of malignant demons. And as it was of infinite importance to the interests of the church, that no impure or malevolent spirit entered into the bodies of such as were appointed to govern or to instruct others; so the people were desirous that the clergy should use their utmost efforts to abstain from the conjugal life. Many of the sacred order, especially in Africa, consented to satisfy the desires of the people, and endeavored to do this in such a manner, as not to offer an entire violence to their own inclinations. For this purpose, they formed connexions with those women who had made vows of perpetual chastity; and it was an ordinary thing for a church to admit one of these fair saints to the participation of his bed, but still under the most solemn declarations that nothing passed in this commerce that was contrary to the rules of chastity and virtue. These holy

concubines were called by the Greeks, *Suneisaktoi* and by the Latins, *Mulieres subintroductæ*. This indecent custom alarmed the zeal of the more pious among the bishops, who employed the utmost efforts of their severity and vigilance to abolish it, though it was a long time before they entirely effected this laudable purpose.

Thus we have given a short, though not a very pleasing view of the rulers of the church during this century; and should now mention the principal writers that distinguished themselves in it by their learned and pious productions.—The most eminent of these, whether we consider the extent of his fame or the multiplicity of his labors, was Origen, *presbyter* and *catechist* of Alexandria, a man of vast and uncommon abilities, and the greatest luminary of the christian world that this age exhibited to view. Had the justness of his judgment been equal to the immensity of his genius, the fervor of his piety, his indefatigable patience, his extensive erudition, and his other eminent and superior talents, all encomiums must have fallen short of his merit. Yet such as he was his virtue and his labors deserve the admiration of all ages; and his name will be transmitted with honor through the annals of time as long as learning and genius shall be esteemed among men.

The second in renown among the writers of this century, was Julius Africanus, a native of Palestine, a man of the most profound erudition, but the greatest part of whose learned labors are unhappily lost.

Hippolytus, whose history is much involved in darkness, is also esteemed among the most celebrated authors and martyrs of this age; but those writings, which at present bear his name, are justly looked upon by many as either extremely corrupted, or entirely spurious.

Gregory, bishop of New Cesarea, acquired at this time, the title of *Thaumaturgus*, i. e. wonderworker, on account of the variety of great and signal miracles, which he is said to have wrought during the course of his ministry. Few of his works have come down to our times, and his miracles are called in question by many, as unsupported by sufficient evidence.

It were to be wished that we had more of the writings of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, than those which have survived the ruins of time, since the few remaining fragments of his works discover the most consummate wisdom and pru-

dence, and the most amiable spirit of moderation and candor, and thus abundantly vindicate, from all suspicion of flattery, the ancients who mentioned him under the title of Dionysius the Great.

Methodius appears to have been a man of great piety, and highly respectable on account of his eminent virtue; but those of his works which are yet extant, discover no great degree of penetration and acuteness in handling controversy and weighing opinions.

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, a man of the most eminent abilities and flowing eloquence, stands foremost in the list of Latin writers. His letters, and indeed the most of his works, breathe such a noble and pathetic spirit of piety, that it is impossible to read them without the warmest feelings of enthusiasm. We must however observe, that he would have been a better writer, had he been less attentive to the ornaments of rhetoric; and a better bishop, had he been able to restrain the vehemence of his temper, and to distinguish, with more acuteness, between truth and falsehood.

The *dialogue* of Minucius Felix, which bears the title of *Octavius*, effaces with such judgment, spirit, and force, the calumnies and reproaches that were cast upon the Christians by their adversaries, that it deserves an attentive perusal from those who are desirous to know the state of the church during this century.

The *seven books* of Arnobius, the African, written *against the Gentiles*, are a still more copious and ample defence of the Christians, and though obscure in several places, may yet be read with pleasure and with profit. It is true, that this rhetorician, too little instructed in the christian religion when he wrote this work, has mingled great errors with solemn truths; and has exhibited christianity under a certain philosophical form, very different from that in which it is commonly received.

We refer our readers, for an account of the authors of inferior note, who lived in this century, to those who have professedly given histories or enumerations of the christian writers.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THIS CENTURY.

Christian doctrine--mystic theology--monks and hermits—spreading the sacred scriptures the lives of Christians--excommunication—penitential discipline.

The principal doctrines of christianity were now explained to the people in their native purity and simplicity, without any mixture of abstract reasonings or subtile invention; nor were the feeble minds of the multitude loaded with a great variety of precepts. But the christian teachers, who had applied themselves to the study of letters and philosophy, soon abandoned the frequented path, and struck out into the devious wilds of fancy. The Egyptians distinguished themselves in this new method of explaining the truth. They looked upon it as a noble and a glorious task to bring the doctrines of celestial wisdom into a certain subjection to the precepts of their philosophy, and to make deep and profound researches into the intimate and hidden nature of those truths which the divine Savior had delivered to his disciples. Origen was at the head of this speculative tribe. This great man, enchanted by the charms of the platonic philosophy, set it up as the test of all religion; and imagined, that the reason of each doctrine were to be found in that favorite philosophy, and their nature and extent to be determined by it. It must be confessed, that he handled this matter with modesty and with caution; but he still gave an example to his disciples, the abuse of which could not fail to be pernicious, and under the authority of which they would naturally indulge themselves without restraint in every wanton fancy. And so, indeed, the case was; for the disciples of Origen, breaking forth from the limits fixed by their master, interpreted, in the most licentious manner, the divine truths of religion according to the tenor of the platonic philosophy. From these teachers the philosophical, or *scholastic theology*, as it is called, derives its origin; and proceeding hence, passed through various forms and modifications according to the genius, turn, and erudition of those who embraced it.

The same principle gave rise to another species of *theology*, which was called *mystic*. And what must seem at first sight surprising here is, that this *mystic theology*, though formed at

the same time, and derived from the same source with the *scholastic*, yet had a natural tendency to overturn and distroy it. The authors of this *mystic* science are not known, but the principles from whence it sprung are manifest. Its first promoters proceeded from that known doctrine of the platonic school, which also was adopted by Origen and his disciples, that *the divine nature was diffused through all human souls*; or, in other words that *the faculty of reason* from which proceeds the health and vigor of the mind, was an *emanation from God into the human soul, and comprehended in it the principles and elements of all truth, human and divine.* They denied that men could, by labor or study, excite this celestial flame in their breasts; and therefore, they disapproved highly of the attempts of those who, by definitions, abstract theorems, and profound speculations, endeavored to form distinct notions of truth, and to discover its hidden nature. On the contrary, they maintained, that *silence*, *tranquility*, *repose*, and *solitude*, accompanied with such acts of mortification as might tend to extenuate and exhaust the body, were the *means* by which the *hidden* and *internal word* was *excited* to produce its latent virtues, and to instruct men in the knowledge of divine things. For thus they reasoned; „they who behold with a noble contempt all human affairs, who turn away their eyes from terrestrial vanities, and shut all the avenues of the outward senses against the contagious influences of a material world, must necessarily return to God when the spirit is thus disengaged from the impediment that prevented that happy union. And in this blessed frame, they not only enjoy inxpressible raptures from their communion with the Supreme Being, but also are invested with the inestimable privilege of contemplating truth undisguised and uncorrupted in its native purity, while others behold it in a vitiated and delusive form."

This method of reasoning produced strange effects, and drove many into cavesand deserts where they macerated their bodies with hunger and thirst, and submitted to all the miseries of the severest discipline that a gloomy imagination could prescribe. And, it is not improbable that Paul, the first hermit, was rather engaged by this fanatical system, than by the persecution under Decius, to fly into the most solitary deserts of Thebais, where he led, during the space of ninety years, a life more worthy of a savage animal than of a rational being. It is, however, to be observed, that though

Paul is placed at the head of the order of hermits, yet that unsociable manner of life was very common in Egypt, Syria, India and Mesopotamia, not only long before his time, but even before the coming of Christ. And it is still practised among the Mahometans, as well as the Christians, in those arid and burning climates. For the glowing atmosphere that surrounds these countries is a natural cause of that love of solitude and repose, of that indolent and melancholy disposition, that are remarkably common among their languid inhabitants.

But let us turn away our eyes from these scenes of fanticism, which are so opprobrious to human nature, and consider some other circumstances that belong more or less to the history of the christian doctrine during this century. And here it is proper to mention the useful labors of those, who manifested their zeal for the holy scriptures by the care they took to have accurate copies of them multiplied every where, and that at such moderate prices, as rendered them of easy purchase; as also to have them translated into various languages, and published in correct editions. Many of the more opulent among the Christians contributed generously a great part of their substance to the carrying on of these pious and excellent undertakings. Pierius and Hesychius in Egypt, and Lucian at Antioch, employed much pains in correcting the copies of the *Septuagint*; and Phamphidus of Cæsarea, labored with great diligence and success in works of the same nature, until a glorious martyrdom finished his course. But Origen surpassed all others in diligence and assidnity; and his famous *Hexapla*, though almost entirely destroyed by the waste of time, will, even in its fragments, remain an eternal monument of the incredible application with which that geat man labored to remove those obstacles which retarded the progress of the gospel.

After the encomiums we have given to Origen, who has an undoubted right to the first place among the interpreters of the scriptures in this century, it is not without a deep concern that we are obliged to add, that he also, by an unhappy method, opened a secure retreat for all sorts of errors that a wild and irregular imagination could bring forth. Having entertained a notion that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to defend every thing contained in the sacred writings from the cavils of heretics and infidels, so long as they were explained *literally*, according to the real import of

the terms, he had recourse to the fecundity of a lively imagination, and maintained, that the holy scriptures were to be interpreted in the same *allegorical* manner that the platonists explained the history of the gods. In consequence of this pernicious rule of interpretation, he alleged, that the words of scripture were, in many places, absolutely void of sense; and that though in others there were, indeed, certain notions conveyed under the outward terms according to their literal force aud import, yet it was not in these that the true meaning of the sacred writers was to be sought, but in a mysterious and hiden sense arising from the nature of the things themselves. This *hidden sense* he endeavors to investigate throughout his *commentaries*, neglecting and despising, for the most part, the *outward letter*, and in this devious path he displays the most ingenious strokes of fancy, though always at the expense of truth, whose divine simplicity is scarcely discernible through the cobweb veil of allegory. Nor did the inventions of Origen end here. He divided this *hidden sense*, which he pursued with such eagerness, into *moral* and *mystical* or *spiritual*. The *moral* sense of scripture displays those doctrines that relate to the inward state of the soul, and the conduct of life. The *mystical* or *spiritual sense* represents the nature, the laws, and the history of the *spiritual* or *mystical world*. We are not yet at the end of the labyrinth; for he subdivided this *mystical* world of his own creation into two distinct regiions, the one of which he called the *superior*, i. e. *heaven*; and the other the *inferior*, by which he meant the *church*. This led to another division of *mystical sense* into an earthly or *allegorical* sense, adapted to the inferior world, and a celestial or *anagogetical* one adapted to the *superior* region. This chimerical method of explaining the scripture was, before Origen, received by many Christians, who were deluded into it by the example of the Jews. But as this learned man reduced it into a system, and founded it upon fixed and determinate rules, he is, on that account, commonly considered as its principal author.

A prodigious number of interpreters, both in this and the succeeding ages, followed the method of Origen though with some variation; nor could the few, who explained the sacred writings with judgment, and a true spirit of criticism, oppose, with any success, the torrent of allegory that was overflowing the church The *commentaries* of Hippolytus, which are yet extant, show manifestly that this good

man was entirely addicted to the system of Origen, and the same judgment may be hazarded concerning Victorinus's *explications* of certain books of the Old and New Testement, though these explications are long since lost. The *translation of the Ecclesiastes* by Gregory Thaumaturgus, which is yet remaining, is not chargeable with this reproach, notwithstanding the tender and warm attachment of its author to Origen. The book of *Genesis* and *the song of Solomon* were explained by Methodius, whose work is lost; and Ammonius composed a *Harmony of the Gospels*.

The doctrinal part of theology employed the pens of many learned men in this century. In his *Stromata*, and his *four books of Elements*, Origen illustrated the greatest part of the doctrines of Christianity, or to speak more properly, rather disguised them under the lines of a vain philosophy. These books of *elements* or *principles*, were the first sketch that appeared of the *scholastic* or *philosophical theology*. Something of the same nature was attempted by Theognostus, in his *seven books of Hypotyposes*, which are only known at present by the extracts of them in Photius, who represents them as the work of one who was infected with the notions of Origen. Gregory Thaumaturgus drew up a brief summary of the christian religion, in his *Exposition of the faith;* and many treated, in a more ample manner, particular points of doctrine in opposition to the enemies and corrupters of christianity. Thus Hypolytus wrote concerning the *Deity*, the *resurrection antichriss*, and the *end of the world*: Methodius, concerning *freewill*; ahd Lucian, concerning *faith*. It is doubtful in what class these productions are to be placed, as the most of them have perished among the ruins of time.

Among the moral writers, the first place, after Turtullian, of whom we have already spoken above, is due, to Cyprian, a prelate of eminent merit, who published several treatises concerning *patience*, *morality*, *works alms*, as also an *exhortation to martyrdom*. In these dissertations, there are many excellent things; but there runs through them all a general want of order, precision and method; nor do we always find solid proofs in favor of the decisions they contain. Origen has written many treatises of this kind, and among others an *exhortation* to suffer martyrdom for the truth; a subject handled by many authors in this century, but with unequal eloquence and penetration. Methodius treated of *chastity*, in a work entitled, *Symposium Virginum*, or, the *Feasts of Vir-*

gins; but this treatise is full of confusion and disorder. Dionysius handled the doctrine of *penance* and *temptations*. The other moral writers of this period are too obscure and trivial to render the mention of them necessary.

The controversial writers were exceeding numerous in this century. The pagans were attacked, and that in a victorious manner, by Minucius Felix, in his dialogue called *Octavius;* by Origen, in his writings against Celsus; by Arnobius in his *seven books against the Gentiles;* and Cyprian in his treatise concerning the *vanity of idols*. The *chronicle* of Hippolytus, in opposition to the Gentiles; and the work of Methodius against Porphyry, that bitter adversary of the Christians, are both lost.

We may also reckon, in the number of the Polemic writers, those who wrote against the philosophers, or who treated any subjects that were disputed between different sects. Such was Hippolytus, who wrote against Plato, and who also treated the nicest, the most difficult, and the most controverted subjects, such as *fate*, *freewill*, and the *origin of evil* which exercised, likewise, the pens of Methodius and other acute writers. What Hyppolytus wrote against the Jews is not come down to our times; but the work of Cyprian, upon that subject, yet remains. Origen, Victorinus, Hippolytus, attacked, in general, all various sects and heresies that divided the church; but their labors in that field have entirely disappeared; and as to those, who only turned their controversial arms against some few sects, and certain particular doctrines, we think it not necessary to enumerate them here.

It is, however, necessary to observe, that the methods now used of defending christianity, and attacking Judaism, and idolatry, degenerated much from the primitive simplicity, and the true rule of controversy. The christian teachers, who had been educated in the schools of the rhetoricians, and sophists, rashly employed the arts and evasions of their subtile masters in the service of christianity; and, intent only upon defeating the enemy, they were too little attentive to the means of victory, indifferent whether they acquired it by artifice or plain dealing. This method of disputing, which the ancients, called *economical*, and which had victory for its object rather than truth, was, in consequence of the prevailing taste for rhetoric and sophistry, almost universally approved. The platonists contributed to the support and

encouragement of this ungenerous method of disputing, by that maxim of theirs which asserted the innocence of defending the truth by artifice and falsehood. This will appear manifest to those who have read, with any manner of penetration and judgment, the arguments of Origen against Celsus, and those of the other christian disputants against the idolatrous Gentiles. The method of Tertullian, who used to plead proscription against erroneous teachers, was not perhaps, unfair in this century; but they must be much unacquainted both with the times, and, indeed, with the nature of things, who imagine, that it is always allowable to employ this method.

This disingenious and vicious method of surprising their adversaries by artifice, and striking them down, as it were, by lies and fictions, produced among other disagreeable effects, a great number of books, which were falsely attributed to certain great men, in order to give these spurious productions more credit and weight. For, as the greatest part of mankind are less governed by reason than by authority, and prefer in many cases, the decisions of fallible mortals to the unerring dictates of the divine world, and the disputants, of whom we are now speaking, thought they could not serve the truth more effectually than by opposing illustrious names and respectable authorities to the attacks of its adversaries. Hence the book of *canons*, which certain artful men ascribed falsely to the apostles; hence, the *apostolical constitutions*, of which Clement, bishop of Rome, is said to have formed a collection; hence the *recognitions* and the *clementina*, which are also attributed to Clement, and many other productions of that nature, which, for a long time, were too much esteemed by credulous men.

Nor were the managers of controversy the only persons who employed these stratagems; the mystics had recourse to the same pious frauds to support their sect. And accordingly, when they were asked from what chief their establishment took its rise, to get clear of this perplexing question, they feigned a chief, and chose, for that purpose, Dionysius the Areopagite, a man of almost Apostolical weight and authority, who was converted to christianity, in the first century, by the preaching of St. Paul at Athens. And to render this fiction more specious, they attributed to this great man various treatises concerning the *monastic life*, the *mystic theology*. and other subjects of that nature, which were the

productions of some senseless and insipid writers of after times. Thus it happened, through the pernicious influence of human passions, which too often mingle themselves with the execution of the best purposes, and the most upright intentions, that they, who were desirous of surpassing all others in piety, looked upon it as lawful, and even laudable, to advance the cause of piety by artifice and fraud.

The most famous controversies that divided the Christians during this century, were those concerning the *millenium*, or *reign of a thousand years*, the *baptism of heretics*, and the *doctrine of* Origen. Long before this period, an opinion had prevailed that Christ was to come and reign a thousand years among men, before the entire and final dissolution of this world. This opinion, which had hitherto met with no opposition, was differently interpreted by different persons; nor did all promise themselves the same kind of enjoyments in that future and glorious kingdom. But in this century its credit began to decline, principally through the influence and authority, of Origen, who opposed it with the greatest warmth, because it was incompatible with some of his favorite sentiments. Nepos, an Egyptian bishop, endeavored to restore this opinion to its former credit, in a book written *against the allegorists*, for so he called, by way of contempt, the adversaries of the Millennarian system. This work and the hypothesis it defended, was extremely well received by great numbers in the canton of Arsinoe; and among others by Colacion, a presbyter of no mean influence and reputation. But Dionysius of Alexandria, a disciple of Origen, stopped the growing progress of this doctrine by his private discourse, and also by two learned and judicious dissertations concerning the *divine promises*.

The disputes concerning the *baptism of heretics* were not carried on with that amiable spirit of candor, moderation, and impartiality, with which Dionysius opposed the Millennian doctrine. The warmth and violence that were exerted in this controversy, were far from being edifying to such as were acquainted with the true genius of christianity, and with that meekness and forbearance that should particularly distinguish its teachers.

As there was no express law which determined the manner and form, according to which those who abandoned the heretical sects were to be received into the communion of the church, the rules practiced in this matter, were not the

same in all christian churches. Many of the oriental and African Christians placed recanting heretics in the rank of catechumens, and admitted them, by *baptism*, into the communion of the faithful; while the greatest part of the European churches, considering the baptism of heretics, as valid used no other forms in their reception, that the *imposition of hands*, accompanied with solemn prayer. This diversity prevailed for a long time without kindling contentions or animosities. But, at length, charity waxed cold, and the fire of church discord broke out. In this century the Asiatic Christians came to a determination in a point that was hitherto, in some measure, undecided; and in one council established it as a law, that all heretics were to be rebaptised before their admission to the communion of the true church. When Stephen, bishop of Rome, was informed of this determination, he behaved with the most unchristian violence and arrogance toward the Asiatic Christians, broke communion with them, and excluded them from the communion of the church of Rome. These haughty proceedings made no impression upon Cyprian bishop of Carthage, who notwithstanding the menaces, of the Roman pontiff, assembled a council on this occasion, adopted, with the rest of the African bishops, the opinion of the Asiatics, and gave notice thereof to the imperious Stephen. The fury of the latter was redoubled at this notification, and produced many threatenings and invectives against Cyprian, who replied, with great force and resolution, and in a second council held at Carthage, declared the baptism, administered by heretics, void of all efficacy and validity. Upon this, the choler of Stephen swelled beyond measure; and by a decree full of invectives, which was received with contempt, he excommunicated the African bishops, whose moderation, on the one hand, and the death of their imperious antagonist on the other, put an end to the violent controversy.

The controversy concerning Origen was set in motion by Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, animated, as some say, by a principle of envy, and hatred against this learned man, with whom he had formerly lived in an intimate friendship. The assertion however, of those who attribute the opposition of Demetrius to this odious principle, appears something more than doubtful; for in the whole of his conduct toward Origen, there are no visible marks of envy, though many indeed of passion and arrogance, of violence and injustice.

The occasion of all this was as follows; in the year 228, Origen having set out for Achaia, was in his journey thither, received with singular marks of affection and esteem by the bishops of Cæsarea and Jerusalem, who ordained him *presbyter* by imposition of hands. This proceeding gave high offence to Demetrius, who declared Origen unworthy of the priesthood, because he had castrated himself, and maintained at the same time, that it was not lawful to advance, to a higher dignity, the principal of the Alexandrian school, which was under his episcopal inspection, without his knowledge and approbation. A conclusion however, was put to these warm debates, and Origen, returned to Alexandria.—This calm was, indeed, but of a short duration, being soon succeeded by a new breach between him and Demetrius, the occasion of which is not known, but which grew to such a height as obliged Origen, in the year 231, to abandon his charge at Alexandria, and retire, to Cæsarea. His absence, however did not appease the resentment of Demetrius, who continued to persecute him with the utmost violence. To satisfy fully his vengeance against Origen, he assembled two councils, in the first of which he condemned him unheard and deprived him of his office; and in the second, had him degraded from the sacredotal dignity. It is probable, that in one of these councils especially the latter, Demetrius accused him of erroneous sentiments in matters of religion; for it was about this time that Origen published his *book of principles;* which contains several opinions of a dangerous tendency. The greatest part of the christian bishops approved of the proceedings of the Alexandrian council, against which the bishops of the churches of Achaia, Palestine, Phœnicia, and Arabia, declared at the same time the highest displeasure.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING THE RITES AND CEREMONIES USED IN THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

Ceremonies multiplied—the causes—the christian assemblies—disputes about Easter—prevailed between the Asiatics and Romans—celebration of the Lord's supper—baptism.

All the records of this century mention the multiplication of rites and ceremonies in the christian church. Several of

the causes that contributed to this have been already pointed out; to which we may add, as a principal one, the passion which now reigned for the platonic philosophy, or rather for the popular oriental superstition concerning *demons*, adopted by the Platonists, and borrowed, unhappily from them, by the Christian teachers. For there is not the least doubt, but that many of the rites, now introduced into the church, derived their origin from the reigning opinions concerning the nature of *demons*, and the *powers* and *operations* of *invisible beings*. Hence the use of *exorcisms* and *spells*, the frequency of *fasts*, and the aversion to *wedlock*. Hence the custom of avoiding all connexions with those who were not as yet baptized, or who lay under the penalty of excommunication, as persons supposed to be under the dominion of some malignant spirit. And hence the rigor and severity of that discipline and penance that were imposed upon those who had incurred, by their immoralities, the censures of the church.

In most of the provinces that were, at this time, certain fixed places set apart for public worship among the Christians, as will appear evident to every impartial inquirer into these matters. Nor is it absolutely improbable, that these churches were, in several places, embellished with images and other ornaments.

With respect to the form of divine worship, and the times appointed for its celebration, there were little innovations made in this century. Two things, however, deserve to be taken notice of here; the first is, that the discourses or sermons, addressed to the people, were very different from those of the earlier times of the church, and degenerated much from the ancient simplicity. For, not to say any thing of Origen, who introduced long sermons, and was the first who explained the scriptures in his discourses, several bishops, who had received there education in the schools of the rhetoricians, were exactly scrupulous, in adapting their public exhortations and discourses to the rules of Grecian eloquence. And this method gained such credit, as to be soon, almost universally followed. The second thing that we proposed to mention as worthy of notice is, that about this time, the use of *incense* was introduced, at least, into many churches. This has been denied by some men of eminent learning; the fact, however, is rendered evident, by the most unexceptionable testimonies.

Several alterations were now introduced, in the celebration of the Lord's supper, by those who had the direction of divine worship. The prayers, used upon this occasion, were lengthened; and the solemnity and pomp, with which this important institution was celebrated, were considerably increased; no doubt, with a pious intention to render it still more respectable. Those who were in a *penitential state*, and those also who had not received the sacrament of baptism, were not admitted to this holy supper; and it is not difficult to perceive, that these exclusions were an imitation of what was practised in the heathen mysteries. We find, by the accounts of Prudentius and others, that gold and silver vessels were now used in the administration of the Lord's supper; nor is there any reason why we should not adopt this opinion, since it is very natural to imagine, that those churches, which were composed of the most opulent members, would readily indulge themselves in this piece of religous pomp. As to the time of celebrating this solemn ordinance, it must be carefully observed, that there was a considerable variation in different churches, arising from their different circumstances, and founded upon reasons of prudence and necessity. In some, it was celebrated in the morning; in others, at noon; and in others, in the evening. It was also more frequently repeated in some churches, than in others; but was considered in all as of the highest importance, and as essential to salvation; for which reason it was even thought proper to administer it to infants. The sacred feasts, that accompanied this venerable institution, preceded its celebration in some churches, and followed it in others.

There were, twice a year, stated times, when baptism was administered to such as, after a long course of trial and preparation, offered themselves as candidates for the profession of christianity. This ceremony was performed only in the presence of such as were already initiated into the christian mysteries. *The remission of sins was thought to be its immediate and happy fruit*; while the bishop, by prayer and the imposition of hands, was supposed to confer those sanctifying gifts of the Holy Ghost, that are necessary to a life of righteousness and virtue. We have already mentioned the principal rites that were used in the administration of baptism; and we have only to add, that none were admitted to this solemn ordinance, until, by the menacing and formidable shouts and declamation of the *exorcist*, they had been deliv-

ered from the dominion of the prince of darkness, and consecrated to the service of God. The origin of this superstitious ceremony may be easily traced, when we consider the prevailing opinions of the times. *The Christians in general were persuaded that rational souls, deriving their existence from God, must consequently be in themselves pure, holy, and endowed with the noble principles of liberty and virtue.* But upon this supposition, it was difficult to account for the corrupt propensities and actions of men, any other way than by atttributing them either to the malignant nature of *matter*, or the influence or impulse of some evil spirit, who was perpetually compelling them to sin. The former of these opinions was embraced by the gnostics, but was rejected by true Christians, who denied the eternity of matter, considered it as a creature of God, and therefore adopted the latter notion, that in all vicious persons there was a certain evil being, the author and source of their corrupt dispositions and unrighteous deeds. The driving out this *demon* was now considered as an essential preparation for baptism, after the administration of which, the candidates returned home, adorned with crowns, and arrayed with white garments, as sacred emblems; the former of their victory over sin and the world; the latter of their inward purity and innocence.

Fasting began now to be held in more esteem than it had formerly been; a high degree of sanctity was attributed to this practice, and it was even looked upon as of indispensable necessity, from a notion that the *demons* directed their stratagems principally against those who pampered themselves with delicious fare, and were less troublesome to the lean and hungry, who lived under the severities of a rigorous abstinence. The Latins, contrary to the general custom, fasted the seventh day of the week; and as the Greeks and orientals refused to follow their example here, this afforded a new subject of contention between them.

The Christians offered up their ordinary prayers at three stated times of the day, viz. at the *third*, the *sixth* and the *ninth hour*, according to the custom observed among the Jews. But besides these stated devotions, true believers were assiduous in their addresses to the Supreme Being, and poured forth frequently their vows and supplications before his throne, because they considered prayer as the most essential duty, as well as the noblest employment, of a sanctified nature. At those festivals, which recalled the memory of

some joyful event, and were to be celebrated with expressions of thanksgiving and praise, they prayed standing, as they thought that posture the fittest to express their joy and their confidence. On days of contrition and fasting, they presented themselves upon their knees before the throne of the Most High, to express their profound humiliation and abasement. Certain forms of prayer were, undoubtedly, used in many places, both in public and in private; but many also expressed their pious feelings in the natural effusions of an unpremeditated eloquence.

The *sign of the cross* was supposed to administer a victorious power over all sorts of trials and calamities, and was more especially considered as the surest defence against the snares and stratagems of malignant spirits. And hence it that no Christian undertook any thing of moment, without arming himself with the influence of this triumphant sign.

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THE DIVISIONS AND HERESIES THAT TEOUBLED THE CHURCH DURING THIS CENTURY.

The remains of ancient sects—Manes and his followers—his doctrine of two principles—his doctrine concerning man---concerning Christ, and the Holy Spirit—concerning the purification of souls and their future condition —the state of the unpurified souls—his views concerning the Old and New Testaments—his rule of life—his disciples divided—the sect of the Hieracites—the Noetian controversy---Sabellius—Beryilus—Paul of Samosata—Arabian philosophers—Novatians.

The same sects that, in the former ages, had produced such disorder and perplexity in the christian church, continued, in this, to create new troubles, and to foment new divisions. The Montanists, Valentinians, Marcionites, and the other gnostics, continued still to draw out their forces, notwithstanding the repeated defeats they had met with; and their *obstinacy* remained even when their *strength* was gone, as it often happens in religious controversies. Adelphius and Aquilinus, who were of the gnostic tribe, endeavored to insinuate themselves and their doctrine into the esteem of the public, at Rome, and in other places in Italy. They were however opposed not only by the Christians, but also by Plotinus, the greatest platonic philosopher of this

age, who, followed by a numerous train of disciples, opposed these two chimerical teachers, and others of the same kind, with as much vigor and success as the most enlightened Christians could have done. The philosophical opinions which this fraction entertained concerning the Supreme Being, the origin of the world, the nature of evil, and several other subjects, were entirely opposite to the doctrines of Plato. Hence the disciples of Jesus, and the followers of Platonus, joined together their efforts against the progress of gnosticism; and there is no doubt but that their united force soon destroyed the credit and anthority of this fantastic sect, and rendered it contemptible in the estimation of the wise.

While the Christians were struggling with these corrupters of the truth, and upon the point of obtaining a complete and decisive victory, a new enemy, more vehement and odious than the rest, started up suddenly, and engaged in the contest. This was Manes, or Manichæus, as he sometimes is called by his disciples, by birth a Persian; educated among the magi, and himself one of that number, before he embraced the profession of christianity. Instructed in all those arts and sciences, which the Persians, and the other neighboring nations, held in the highest esteem, he had penetrated into the depths of astronomy in the midst of a rural life; studied the art of healing, and applied himself to painting and philosophy. His genius was vigorous and sublime, but redundant and ungoverned; and his mind, destitute of a proper temperature, seemed to border on fanaticism and madness. He was so adventurous as to attempt a coalition of the doctrine of the magi with the christian system, or rather the explication of the one by the other; and, in order to succeed in this audacious enterprise, he affirmed that Christ had left the doctrine of salvation unfinished and imperfect; and that he was the *comforter*, whom the departing Savior had promised to his disciples to lead them to all truth. Many were deceived by the eloquence of this enthusiast, by the gravity of his countenance, and the innocence and simplicity of his manners; so that, in a short time, he formed a sect not utterly inconsiderable in point of number. He was put to death by Varanes 1. king of the Persians; though historians are not agreed concerning the cause, the time, and manner of his execution.

The doctrine of Manes, was a mixture of the tenets of christianity with the ancient philosophy of the Persians,

which he had been instructed in during his youth. He combined these two systems, and applied and accommodated to Jesus Christ the characters and actions which the Persians attributed to the god Mithras. The principal doctrines of Manes are comprehended in the following summary.

"There are two principles from which all things proceed, the one is a most *pure and subtile matter*, called *Light*; and the other a *gross and corrupt substance*, called *Darkness*. Each of these are subject to the dominion of a superintending Being, whose existance is from all eternity. The Being, who presides over the light, is called God; he that rules the *land of Darkness*, bears the title of *Hyle*, or *Demon*. The ruler of the Light is supremely happy; and in consequence thereof, benevolent and good; the Prince of Darkness is unhappy in himself; and desiring to render others partakers of his misery, is evil and malignant. These two beings have produced an immense multitude of creatures, resembling themselves, and distributed them through their respective provinces.

"The Prince of Darkness knew not, for a long series of ages, that Light existed in the universe; and no sooner perceived it, by the means of a war that was kindled in his dominion, than he bent his endeavors toward subjecting it to his empire. The Ruler of the Light opposed to his efforts an army commanded by the *first man*, but not with the highest success, for the generals of the Prince of Darkness seized upon a considerable portion of the celestial elements, and of the Light itself, and mingled them in the mass of corrupt matter. The second general of the Ruler of the Light, whose name was the *living spirit*, made war with more success against the Prince of Darkness, but could not entirely disengage the pure particles of the celestial matter, from the corrupt mass through which they had been dispersed. The Prince of Darkness, after his defeat, produced the first parents of the human race. The beings engendered from this original stock, consist of a body formed out of the corrupt matter of the kingdom of Darkness, and of two souls; one of which is *sensitive* and *lustful*, and owes its existence to the *evil principle*; the other *rational* and *immortal*, a particle of that divine Light, which was carried away by the army of Darkness, and immersed into the mass of malignant matter.

"Mankind being thus formed by the Prince of Darkness, and those minds, that were the productions of the eternal

Light, being united to their mortal bodies', God created the earth out of the corrupt mass of matter, by that *living spirit*, who had vanquished the Prince of Darkness. The design of this creation was to furnish a dwelling for the human race, to deliver, by degrees, the captive souls from the corporal prisons, and to extract the celestial element from the gross substance in which they were involved. In order to carry this design into execution, God produced *two beings* of eminent dignity from his own substance, which were to lend their auspicious succors to imprisoned souls; one of these sublime entities was Christ; and the other, the Holy Ghost. Christ is that glorious intelligence, which the Persians called *Mithras;* he is a most splendid substance, consisting of the brightness of the Eternal Light; subsisting in, and by himself endowed with life; enriched with infinite wisdom: *and his residence is in the sun.* The Holy Ghost is also a luminous and animated body, diffused throughout every part of the atmosphere which surrounds this terrestrial globe. This *genial principle* warms and illuminates the minds of men, renders also the earth fruitful, and draws forth gradually from its bosom the latent particles of celestial fire, which it wafts up on high to their primitive station.

"After that the Supreme Being had, for a long time, admonished and exhorted the captive souls, by the ministry of the angels and of holy men, raised up and appointed for that purpose, he ordered Christ to leave the solar regions, and to descend upon earth, in order to accelerate the return of those imprisoned spirits to their celestial country. In obedience to this divine command, Christ appeared among the Jews, clothed with the shadowy form of a human body, and not with the real substance. During his ministry, he taught mortals how to disengage the rational soul from a corrupt body, to conquer the violence of malignant matter, and he demonstrated his divine mission by stupendous miracles.—On the other hand, the Prince of Darkness used every method to inflame the Jews against the divine messenger, and incited them at length to put him to death upon an ignominious cross; which punishment, however, he suffered not in reality, but only in appearance, and in the opinion of men. When Christ had fulfilled the purposes of his mission, he returned to his throne in the sun, and appointed a certain number of chosen apostles to propagate through the world the religion he had taught during the course of his ministry.

But before his departure, he promised, that, at a certain period of time, he would send an apostle superior to all others in eminence and dignity, whom he called the *paraclete*, or *comforter*, who should add many things to the precepts he had delivered, and dispel all the errors under which his servants labored concerning divine things. This *comforter*, thus expressly promised by Christ, is MANES the Persian, who, by the order of the Most High, declared to mortals the whole doctrine of salvation, without exception, and without concealing any of its truths, under the veil of metaphor, or any other covering.

"Those souls, who believe Jesus Christ to be the son of God, renounce the worship of the God of the Jews, who is the Prince of Darkness, obey the laws delivered by Christ as they are enlarged and illustrated by the *comforter*, Manes, and combat, with persevering fortitude, the lusts and appetites of a corrupt nature, derive from this faith and obedience the inestimable advantage of being gradually purified from the contagion of matter. *The total purification of souls cannot indeed be accomplished during this mortal life. Hence it is, that the souls of men, after death*, must pass through two states more of probation and trial, by *water* and *fire*, before they can ascend to the regions of Light. They mount, therefore first into the moon, which consists, of benign and salutary *water;* from whence, after a lustration, of fifteen days, they proceed to the sun whose purifying *fire* removes entirely all their corruption, and effaces all their stains. The bodies, composed of malignant matter, which they have left behind them, return to their first state, and enter into their original mass.

"On the other hand, those souls who have neglected the salutary work of their purification, pass, after death, into the bodies of animals, or other natures, where they remain until they have expiated their guilt, and accomplished their probation. Some, on account of their peculiar obstinacy and perverseness, pass through a severer course of trial, being delivered over, for a certain time, to the power of malignant aerial spirits, who torment them in various ways. When the greatest part of the captive souls are restored to liberty, and to the regions of light, then a devouring fire shall break forth, at the divine command, from the caverns in which it is at present confined, and shall destroy and consume the frame of the world. After this tremendous event,

the Prince and *powers of darkness* shall be forced to return to their primitive seats of anguish and misery, in which they shall dwell for ever. For, to prevent their ever renewing this war in the regions of *light*, God shall surround the mansions of Darkness with an invincible guard, composed of those souls who are irrecoverably fallen from the hopes of salvation, and who, set in array, like a military band, shall surround those gloomy seats of wo, and hinder any of their wretched inhabitants from coming forth again to the *light*."

In order to remove the strongest obstacles that lay against the belief of this monstrous system, Manes rejected almost all the sacred books in which Christians look for the sublime truths of their holy religion. He affirmed, in the first place that the Old Testament was not the word of God but of the Prince of Darkness, who was substituted by the Jews in the place of the true God. He maintained further, that the *Four Gospels* which contain the history of Christ, were not written by the apostles, or, at least, that they were corrupted and interpolated by designing and artful men, and were augmented with Jewish fables and fictions. He therefore supplied their place, by a *gospel*, which he said was dictated to him by God himself, and which he distinguished by the title of *Erteng*. He rejected also the *Acts of the Apostles;* and though he acknowledged the *epistles* that are attributed to St. Paul, to be the productions of that divine apostle, yet he looked upon them as considerably corrupted and falsified in a variety of passages. We have not any certain account of the judgment he formed concerning the other books of the New Testament.

The rule of life and manners that Manes prescribed to his disciples was most extravagantly rigorous and austere. He commanded them to mortify and macerate the body which he looked upon as *intrinsically* evil and *essentially* corrup to deprive it of all those objects which could contribute either to its conveniency or delight; to extirpate all those desires that lead to the pursuit of external objects; and to divest themselves of all the passions and instincts of nature. Such was the unnatural rule of practice which this enormous fanatic prescribed to his followers; but foreseeing, at the same time, that his sect could not possibly become numerous, if this severe manner of living was to be imposed without distinction upon all his adherents, he divided his disciples into *two* classes; the *one* of which comprehended the perfect Chris-

tians, under the name of the *elect;* and the other, the imperfect and feeble under the title of *hearers*. The *elect* were obliged to a rigorous and entire abstinence from flesh, eggs, milk, fish, wine, all intoxicating drink, wedlock, and all amorous gratifications; and to live in a state of the sharpest penury, nourishing their shriveled and emaciated bodies with bread, herbs, pulse, and melons, and depriving themselves of all the comforts that arise from the moderate indulgence of natural passions, and also from a variety of innocent and agreeable pursuits. The discipline, appointed for the *hearers* was of a milder nature. They were allowed to possess houses, lands, and wealth, to feed upon flesh, to enter into the bonds of conjugal tenderness, but this liberty was granted them with many limitations, and under the strictest conditions of moderation and temperance.

The general assembly of the Manicheans was headed by a president who represented Jesus Christ. There were joined to him *twelve rulers* or *masters*, who were designed to represent the *twelve apostles;* and these were followed by *seventy-two bishops*, the images of the *seventy-two disciples* of our Lord. These bishops had *presbyters* and *deacons* under them, and all the members of these religious orders were chosen out of the class of the elect.

The sect of the Hieracites was formed in Egypt, towards the conclusion of this century, by Hierax of Leontim; a bookseller by profession, and distinguished eminently by his extensive learning, and a venerable air of sanctity and virtue. Some have considered this as a branch of the Manichean sect, but without foundation; since notwithstanding the agreement of Manes and Hierax in some points of doctrine, it is certain that they differed in many respects. Hierax maintained that the principal object of Christ's office and ministry was the promulgation of a *new law*, more severe and perfect than that of Moses; and from hence he concluded, that the use of flesh, wine, wedlock, and of other things agreeable to the outward senses, which had been permitted under the Mosaic dispensation, was absolutely prohibited and abrogated by Christ. If, indeed we look attentively into his doctrine, we shall find that, like Manes, he did not think that these austere acts of self-denial were imposed by Christ indiscriminately upon all, but on such only as were ambitious of aspiring to the highest summit of virtue. To this capital error he added many others, which were partly the conse-

quences of this illusion, and were in part, derived from other sources. He excluded for example, from the kingdom of heaven children who died before they had arrived to the use of reason, and that upon the supposition, that God was bound to administer the rewards of futurity to those only who had fairly finished their victorious conflict with the body and its lusts. He maintained also, that Melchisedec, king of Salem who blessed Abraham ,was the Holy Ghost; denied the resurrection of the body, and cast a cloud of obscurity over the sacred Scriptures by his allegorical fictions.

The controversies relating to the divine Trinity, which took their rise in the former century, from the introduction of the Grecian philosophy into the christian church, were now spreading with considerable vigor, and producing various methods of explaining that inexplicable doctrine. One of the first who engaged in this idle and perilous attempt of explaining what every mortal must acknowledge to be incomprehensible, was Noetus of Smyrna, an obscure man, and of mean abilities. He affirmed, that the Supreme God, whom he called *Father*, and considered as absolutely indivisible, united himself to the man Christ, whom he called the *Son*, and was born, and crucified with him. From this opinion, Noetus and his followers were distinguished by the title of Patripassians, i. e. persons who believe that the Supreme Father of the universe and not any other divine person, had expiated the guilt of the human race. And, indeed, this appellation belongs to them justly, if the accounts which ancient writers give us of their opinions be accurate and impartial.

About the middle of this century arose Sabellius, an African bishop or presbyter, who, in Pentapolis, a province of Cyrenaica, and in Ptolemais, or Barce, its principal city, explained, in a manner very little different from that of Noetus the doctrine of Scripture concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This dogmatist had a considerable number of followers, who adhered to him, notwithstanding that his opinions were refuted by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria.— His sentiments were, in some respects, different from those of Noetus; the latter was of opinion, that the *person* of the Father had assumed the human nature of Christ; whereas Sabellius maintained, that a certain *energy* only, proceeding from the Supreme Parent, or a certain portion of the divine nature, was united to the Son of God, and the man Jesus; and he considered, in the same manner, the *Holy Ghost*, as a

portion of the everlasting Father. From hence it appears, that the Sabellians, though they might with justice be called Patripassians, were yet called so, by the ancients, in a different sense from that in which this name was given to the Noetians.

At this same period, Beryllus an Arabian, bishop of Bozrah, and a man of eminent piety and learning, taught that Christ, before his birth, had no proper subsistence nor any other divinity than that of the Father; which opinion, when considered with attention, amounts to this; that Christ did not exist before Mary, but that a *spirit* issuing from God himself, and therefore superior to all human souls, as being a portion of the divine nature, was united to him at the time of his birth. Beryllus, however, was refuted by Origen, with such a victorious power of argument and zeal that he yielded up the cause, and returned into the bosom of the church.

Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, and also a magistrate or civil judge, was very different from the pious and candid Beryllus, both in point of morals and doctrine. He was a vain and arrogant man whom riches had renered insolent and self-sufficient. He introduced much confusion and trouble into the eastern churches, by his new explication of the doctrine of the gospel concerning the nature of God and Christ, and left behind him a sect, that assumed the title of Paulians, or Paulianists, As far as we can judge of his doctrine by the accounts of it that have been transmitted to us, it seems to have amounted to this; "that the *Son* and the *Holy Ghost* exist in *God* in the same manner as the faculties of *reason* and *activity* do in man; that Christ was born a mere man; but that the *reason* or *wisdom* of the Father descended into him, and by him wrought miracles upon earth and instructed the nations; and finally, that on account of this union of the *divine word* with the *man* Jesus, Christ might, though improperly, be called *God*."

Such were the real sentiments of Paul. He involved them, however, in such deep obscurity, by the ambiguous forms of speech he made use of to explain and defend them, that, after several meetings, of the councils held to examine his errors, they could not convict him of heresy. At length, indeed a council was assembled, in the year 269, in which Malchion, the rhetorician, drew him forth from his obscurity, detected his evasions, and exposed him in his true colors; in

consequence of which he was degraded from the episcopal order.

It was not only in the point now mentioned, that the doctrine of the gospel suffered, at this time, from the erroneous fancies of wrongheaded teachers. For there sprung up now, in Arabia, a certain sort of minute philosophers, the disciples of a master, whose obscurity has concealed him from the knowledge of after ages, who denied the immortality of the soul, believed that it perished with the body; but maintained, at the same time, that it was to be again recalled to life with the body; by the power of God. The philosophers, who held this opinion, were called Arabians from their country. Origen was called from Egypt to make head against this rising sect, and disputed against them, in a full council, with such remarkable succes that they abandoned their erroneous sentiments, and returned to the received doctrine of the church.

Among the sects that arose in this century, we place that of the Novatians the last. This sect cannot be charged with having corrupted the doctrine of christianity by their opinions; their crime was, that by the unreasonable severity of their discipline, they gave occasion to the most deplorable divisions, and made an unhappy rent in the church. Novatian, a presbyter of the church of Rome, a man also of uncommon learning and eloquence, but of an austere and rigid character, entertained the most unfavorable sentiments of of those who had been separated from the communion of the church. He indulged his inclination to severity so far, as to deny that such as had fallen into the commission of grevious transgressions, especially those who had apostized from the faith, under the persecution set on foot by Decius, were to be again received into the bosom of the church.— The greatest part of the presbyters were of a different opinion in this matter, especially Cornelius, whose credit, and influence were raised to the highest pitch by the esteem and admiration which his eminent virtues so naturally excited.— Hence it happened, that when a bishop was to be chosen, in the year 250, to succeed Fabianus in the see of Rome, Novatian opposed the election of Cornelius with the greatest activity and bitterness. His opposition, however, was in vain, for Cornelius was chosen to that eminent office of which his distinguished merit rendered him so highly worthy. Novatian, upon this, separated himself from the jurisdiction of

Cornelius, who in his turn, called a council at Rome, in the year 251, and cut off Novatian and his partisans, from the communion of the church. This turbulent man, being thus excommunicated, erected a new society, of which he was the first bishop; and which, on account of the severity of its discipline, was followed by many, and flourished, until the fifth century, in the greatest part of those provinces which had received the gospel. The chief person who assisted Novatian in this enterprise, was Novatus, a Carthagenian presbyter, a man of no principles, who during the heat of this controversy, had come from Carthage to Rome, to escape the resentment and excommunication of Cyprian, his bishop with whom he was highly at variance.

There was no difference in point of doctrine, between the Novatians and other Christians. What peculiarly distinguished them was their refusing to readmit to the communion of the church, those who, after baptism, had fallen into the commission of heinous crimes, though they did not pretend, that even such were excluded from all possibility or hopes of salvation. They considered the christian church as a society where virtue and innocence reigned universally, and none of whose members, from their entrance into it, had defiled themselves with any enormous crime; and, of consequence, they looked upon every society, which readmitted heinous offenders to its communion, as unworthy of the title of a true christian church. It was from hence also, that they assumed the title of *Cathcri*, i. e. the *pure*: and what showed still a more extravagant degree of vanity and arrogance, they obliged such as came over to them from the general body of Christians, to submit to be baptized a second time, as a necessary preparation for entering into their society. For such a deep root had their favorite opinion concerning the irrevocable rejection of heinous offenders taken in their minds, and so great was its influence upon the sentiments they entertained of other christian societies, that they considered *the baptism administered* in those churches, which received the lapsed to their communion, even after the most sincere and undoubted repentance, as absolutely *divested of the power of imparting the remission of sins.*

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MAIN ERRATA.

Preface—constitutes is put constitute.
Page 21. Aristelians for Aristotelians.
" 102. Secretaries for sectaries.
" 159. Note. Compliment for complement.
" 176. Acolyuhi for Acolythi.
" 182. Regliion for region.
" 185. World for word.

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